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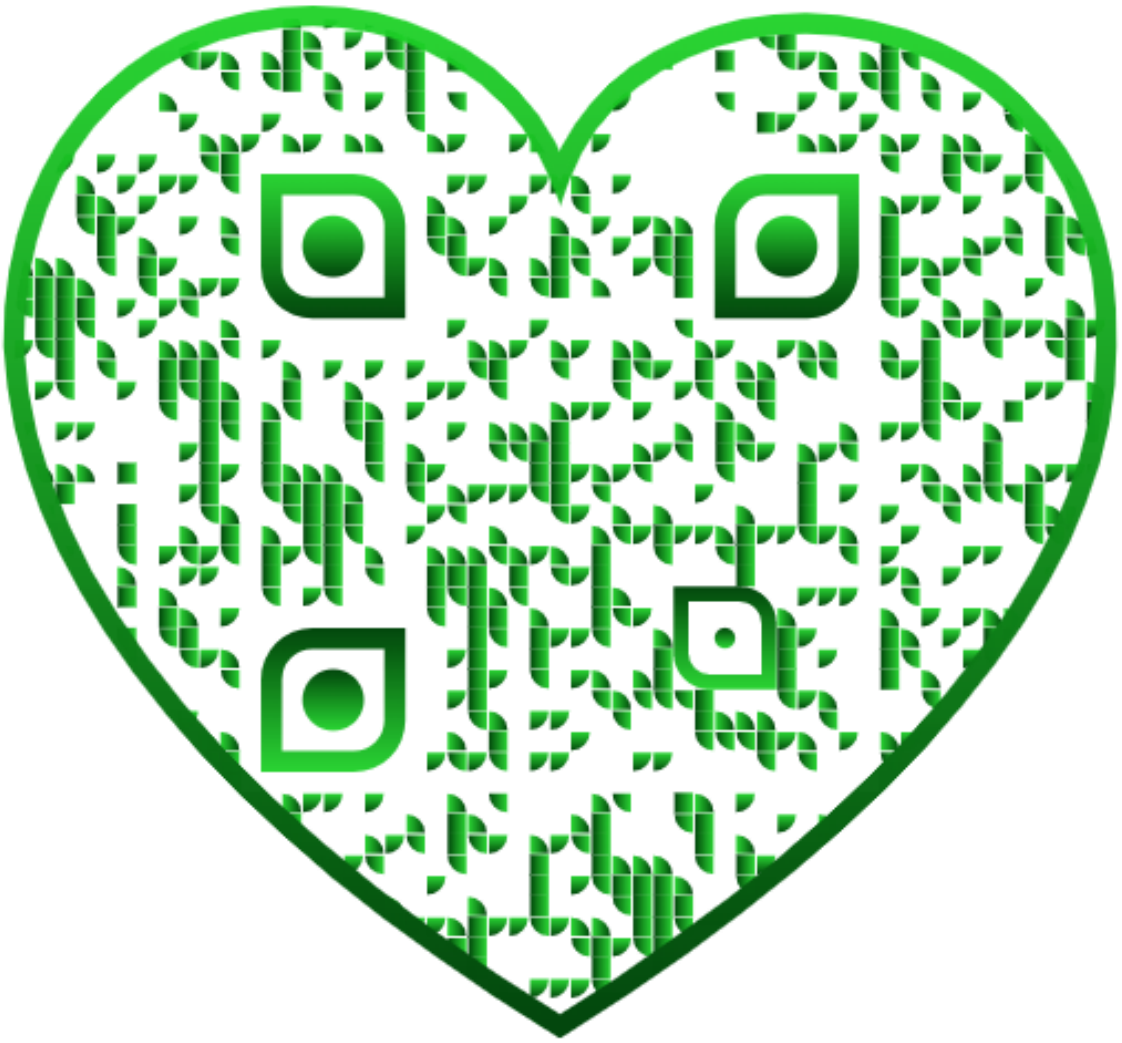

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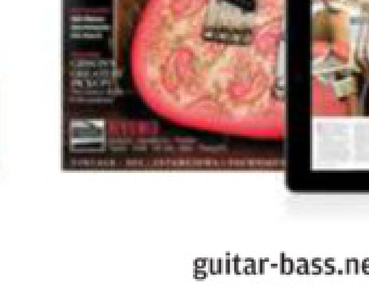
Turn on, tune up, turn down...

I still remember in crystalline detail my first close encounter with a 100-watt valve stack. It was a Plexi reissue in the basement demo room of a music shop in South Wales, which the staff members sensibly vacated when I plugged in the best guitar in the building: a '57 Goldtop reissue (another first for my younger self). What happened next was as terrifying as it was revelatory. Firing up the amp and flipping straight to the bridge pickup (I didn't understand neck pickups back then and, if I'm honest, I still spend most of a live set down at the bridge), I was amazed as the amp transitioned from clean to crunch during the travel of the first two notches of its volume control. I also discovered the amp didn't get any louder from there on in, just dirtier. But loud? Pardon?! This wasn't just loud, it was a physical pummelling. It must have sounded terrible upstairs, as the sheer volume made the playing experience more akin to alligator wrestling than anything I'd experienced before. It was glorious.

Of course, apart from the obvious danger of hearing damage, these days the opportunities to use a 100-watt Plexi in anger are virtually zero. Indeed, the last time I played on a big outdoor stage at a festival I was told by the soundman that my 18-watt 1x12 combo was too loud, despite having the volume set lower than it would be in a small rehearsal room.

If, like me, you stubbornly refuse to contemplate using anything other than a valve amplifier, then the answer might just be a power attenuator. I've owned a few and never really got on with them, but I can honestly say that the brilliantly-named 'Elevenator' that Huw Price designed and built for this month's DIY Workshop on p45 not only works beautifully but costs less than £40 for the component parts. Who knows, when you tell them what it does, your bandmates, neighbours or family might even stump up the cash themselves... Let us know how you get on.



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Turn to **page 36** to take advantage of this month's special *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

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MEET THE EXPERTS...

HUW PRICE

Our senior product specialist spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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Opening bars...

Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and a chance to win two Hudson Electronics pedals

ONES TO WATCH

Kansas troubadour's Singing Saw

KEVIN MORBY

A pair of tranquil American locations shaped the recording of Kansas-born singer-songwriter Kevin Morby's new album *The Singing Saw*. The record was written in the rural confines of Mt Washington, overlooking the sprawlng metropolis of LA and recorded at The Isokon, a remote studio hidden away among the trees in Woodstock, New York – an area indelibly associated with Bob Dylan.

Dylan's influence, and to a lesser degree that of The Velvet Underground, is writ large across Morby's third full-length release since going solo after spells in American bands Woods and The Babies. It's a work of intelligent songwriting that covers Americana, folk and lo-fi rock. The artful arrangements are scattered with guest appearances on brass, strings and even the instrument that gave the album its name – a saw played with a bow to haunting effect by John Andrews of Boston psychedelic band Quilt.

"I was in Woods for five years and The Babies for just as long and it got complicated being in two bands the more succesful each band got," says Morby. "The tour schedules were pretty crazy. I took everything I learned from being in both those bands and applied it to going solo.

"Mt Washington was the first time I'd had a lot of privacy and space to myself, and that really helped to shape the record. Woodstock was great; we didn't spend too much time in the town because we were busy recording. The guy who owns the place has an A frame cabin house, and he's turned the top floor into a recording studio. We'd sleep there and not leave all day and there were no other houses around for miles, so it was really peaceful and beautiful."

Production duties were handled by Sam Cohen, who Morby met during the pair's perfomances in The Complete Last Waltz – a concert to recreate The Band's legendary final performance in 1976 with an all-star cast directed by Cohen.

"It was really fun. It happened last-minute," recalls Morby of his appearance, in which he played The *W.S. Walcott Medicine Show* from the album *Stage Fright*. "There were other people playing that I really respected, like Cass McCombs and Nels Cline, and it was an incredible experience. I sang my one song, but to watch the whole show with 2,000 people singing every word was a really cool experience. Sam was so good at conducting and taking care of this 30-piece band that I thought he'd be great to work with on the record. He knows so many talented musicians, too."

Despite the intricately woven arrangements on *The Singing Saw*, Morby prefers to keep his guitar sound simple, staying true to his Mexican Jaguar and a Fender Vibrolux and using a minimalist pedalboard. "My main guitar is named Dorothy, a red Fender Jaguar, Mexican Series. I have a 70s Yamaha Spanish-style that I write a lot on and a Baby Taylor that's fun to write on, and a weird Peavey from the 80s. I've tried so many times to buy other nice guitars and ended up taking them right back to the store, because all I ever want to use is the Jaguar. In 2014, I bought a really nice semi-hollow sunburst Telecaster that I'd always wanted, and I bought a Rickenbacker too, and I took them back after a day. I use a Boss trem pedal and I've used a Fender DeVille up until now, but the Vibrolux is a great amplifier. The DeVille is so fucking loud! In The Babies, we used more gain and it was OK, but it seems so unnecessarily loud for what I do solo, and the Vibrolux's tone is a little nicer and I can get the volume up to about four.

"I use a [EHX] Linear Power Booster. I've tried to buy so many expensive nice pedals, too, but I end up wanting to use the $40 LPB and the Boss tremolo. I use those two and a tuner and that's it."

UK audiences will get a rare chance to catch Morby live when he plays at London's Oslo Hackney on 5 May and End Of The Road Festival in Wiltshire from 2-4 September. *The Singing Saw* was released on April 15 on Dead Oceans.

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bob Dylan, The Velvet Underground*

GEAR *Kevin Morby*

- **GUITARS** Mexican Fender Jaguar, Yamaha Spanish-style, Baby Taylor
- **PEDALS** Boss Tremolo, Electro-Harmonix LPB
- **AMPLIFIER** Fender Vibrolux

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Yorkshire's Hudson Electronics has become one of the UK's most respected boutique pedal manufacturers, hand-building its stompboxes using new old stock components, including germanium and silicon transistors. The Broadcast is a true-bypass Neve-inspired clean boost and drive pedal that scored an impressive 10/10 in our review back in the April issue of *G&B*, while the Sidecar is an overdrive with a Baxandall tone stack that can deliver anything from mild gain to full-on fuzz. One lucky winner will receive both pedals, worth £155 each. To enter, simply go to www.guitar-bass.net/comps/hudson and correctly answer the question below. For more information on Hudson Electronics, visit www.hudsonelectronicsuk.com.

Q By which iconic drive pedal was the Hudson Electronics Sidecar inspired?

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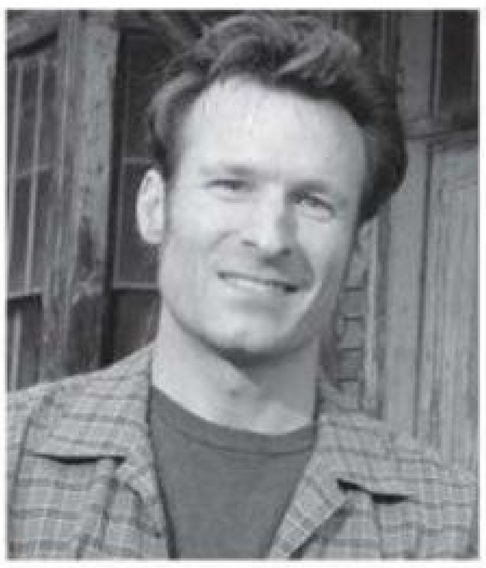
Letters from America

Inspired by the car industry, Mark Fuqua's MotorAve McQueen takes iconic inspiration into new territory. **DAVE HUNTER** takes it for a spin...



DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Cars and guitars have gone together beautifully since the early days of rock and roll. Whether a manufacturer has taken inspiration from a hot-rodded '57 Chevrolet, a range of Detroit-influenced custom colours, the chrome fins of a Cadillac Fleetwood or Steve McQueen's Bullitt Mustang Fastback GT, the transition from steel and rubber to wood and wire has been rendered so frequently that the two worlds have remained entwined sentimentally in the eyes of many players and makers alike. Few makers have embodied the sense of street-rod romance quite as artfully, however, as MotorAve Guitars.

Mark Fuqua, MotorAve's sole proprietor and builder (well, his wife Kate covers much of the admin), got his start at Chandler Guitars in San Francisco, California, in 1990 after an early career as a guitarist. His vision was formed more fully, though, after he opened his own repair shop further south in Los Angeles, where the people of that city's propensity for cruising the strip in modified hotrods informed an aesthetic that inspires him to this day.

The first MotorAve guitars were produced in a workshop on Venice Boulevard in West LA. The operation was moved to a premises on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood for a time, before a cross-country relocation to North Carolina in 2007, where Fuqua remains today.

If you're at all hip to contemporary rock of the past decade you'll have seen a MotorAve BelAire in the hands of Queens Of The Stone Age star Josh Homme, an association that has led that big-bodied semi to be Mark's most popular design. Fuqua's thinner solidbody LeMans – sort of an SG meets Gretsch Corvette, but with far more originality than that implies – is probably his second most frequently seen model. But it's the sleek, sexy, none-more-rock McQueen that we're exploring this issue. The McQueen's inspirations are clear, yet it's one of the most nuanced and stylish takes on the hallowed Les Paul I've ever seen. And that's exactly the idea.

The first McQueen was designed and built when a Los Angeles musical pal of Fuqua's needed a Les Paul to land a gig with a band that required him to play a rendition of the iconic singlecut, but he wanted something slightly... different. The results speak for themselves. As these photos reveal, the McQueen's design incorporates something very close to the same mass as the classic Gibson, yet it gives the body lines a distinct MotorAve-style twist. The result is a guitar that is somehow hauntingly familiar, yet it looks as if it's racing to get there ahead of its stodgy, rounded predecessor. Rather like, in fact, a cartoon hotrod that appears to lean forward on as its elongated tyres squeal and spin in place before it finally peels out and screeches into its take-off.

I have most often seen the McQueen with more of a Les Paul Custom look – black top finish with green abalone block fingerboard inlays – perhaps because at least two of that type have been made, whereas the others to date are essentially one-offs. This one, however, with its gorgeous yet not ostentatious figured maple top and faded, golden-hued Iced-tea Burst finish (which is barely a burst at all, but absolutely gorgeous), comes off more like a '59 Standard. Even

It's one of the most nuanced and stylish takes on the hallowed Les Paul I've seen. And that's the idea

Steve Katz

KEY FEATURES

MotorAve McQueen

- **PRICE** Approximately £3,160 as reviewed, excluding shipping and duties
- **BODY** Chambered mahogany, carved figured maple top
- **NECK** Glued-in mahogany with carbon fibre reinforcement rails, slim-C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Rosewood, 12" radius, 1.68" width at nut
- **FRETS** 22 medium-jumbo
- **PICKUPS** Wolfetone Dr. Vintage humbuckers
- **ELECTRONICS** Independent volume and tone controls, three-way selector
- **FINISH** Nitrocellulose lacquer in Faded Iced-tea Burst
- **HARDWARE** Custom brushed aluminium pickguard and truss-rod cover, TonePros AVR II bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Kluson tuners
- **STRINGS** .011-.048 GHS Boomers
- **CASE** Reunion Blues gigbag
- **CONTACT** MotorAve.com

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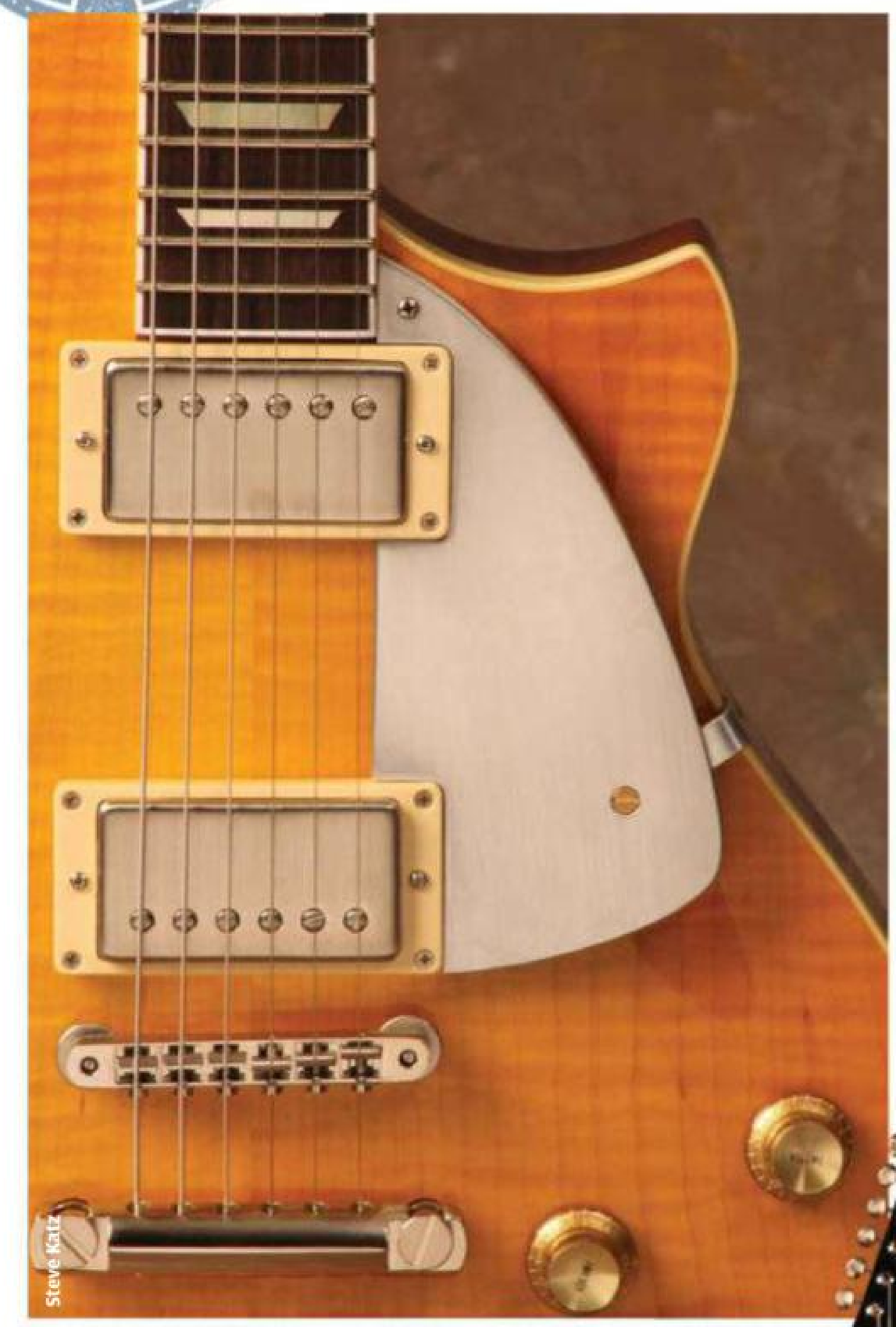

so, the custom MotorAve details take it somewhere else entirely. The dual humbuckers (respected Wolfetone Dr. Vintage units), TonePros tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar and four-knob/three-way toggle electronics complement stick to tradition. However, the sultry, asymmetrical offset look of the body and the brushed aluminium pickguard quickly signal that we're not in Kalamazoo anymore.

That impression is quickly consolidated as you work your way up the neck. Mid-flight, it's all still comfortably familiar – although what you can't see counts too, including a mortise neck joint with extended tenon, carbon-fibre reinforcing rails to bolster the traditional truss rod and a scarf-jointed headstock for added strength. Up top, we're in entirely new territory for this breed of guitar. Rather than the classic three-a-side headstock, Fuqua has given the McQueen his sharp six-a-side design, the same used on the LeMans. On paper, it might sound an odd match-up, but in person it doesn't jar in the least. It's still a back-angled design, but the format allows a straight run from nut slots to tuner posts, which should aid the tuning stability.

On the other side of the coin, it also removes that string spread from nut to tuner that's requisite of the original Les Paul design, which purportedly enhances resonance by increasing tension in the nut slots. But hey, this isn't intended to be a dead-on LP, as we've already seen, and it's another interesting point of departure. Also up at this end is a brushed-aluminium truss-rod cover to match the 'guard, and a set of vintage-style Kluson tuners with modest nickel buttons, which I agree work better than would a set of pearloid or green-key keystone tuners.

The creatively chambered mahogany body keeps the weight down to just under 8lbs without seeming to denude the mass and sustain one jot, and the McQueen's shape hangs just as easily on the strap as it sits comfortably in the lap. Fuqua says the design results in a somewhat "smaller and tighter" tone, and I wouldn't call that verdict inaccurate. At first blush, though – tested through modified JTM45-style and custom AC15-style heads through a range of cabs – I'd say the guitar also ably nails just about anything you'd expect to need a traditional Les Paul for. The Wolfetones are capable PAF-style pickups, with good edge and bite, and a focused response that's also enticingly rich and lively. As such, they help the McQueen excel at more vintage-leaning humbucker voicings, with great raw rock 'n' roll snarl in the bridge position with either amp pushed into breakup, or surprisingly clear twang when you clean it all up. The neck pickup is as buoyant and round as you might hope, with plenty of vocal thickness, but admirably clear, too.

In brief, given the template, there are no major surprises – yet the McQueen does everything elegantly and well, and is smoothly and superbly playable in the process. Some players like to look down and see the same old carved-top, singlecut shape that their heroes played when they were doing these tricks. Personally, it's refreshing to be able to get there with an alternative look in your hands. I certainly don't feel the McQueen's fast curves and sexy slant lose anything in the rawk department; and besides, they just might inspire me to come up with something a bit... different.

READER BOARDS

MIKE KEEGAN plays a variety of heavy rock, funk, blues and Americana styles, so his board has to cover a lot of bases...

KIT LIST

Mike Keegan

- **PEDALS** Dunlop SW95 Slash Signature Cry Baby Wah Wah, Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner, Carl Martin PlexiTone Single Channel, Ethos Overdrive Preamp (with additional TLE/Classic switch, HRM EQ and HRM bypass switch), Zakk Wylde Rotovibe, Red Witch Violetta Delay and Mesa Boogie Tone-Burst Boost/Overdrive.
- **PATCH CABLES** Diago PF04 Patchfactory cables and Diago PF02 Patchfactory solderless jack plugs
- **POWER SUPPLY** Dunlop DCB-10-UK DC-Brick
- **BOARD TYPE** Diago PB03 Showman pedalbaord with Diago Pedal Riser for the Violetta because it's so tiny
- **HEAR IT HERE** soundcloud.com/jajaerne/slide-for-readers-boards

What inspired this setup?

"Sheer frustration. I love heavy music like Down and Slash's AFD sound, but I also love playing funk, blues and Americana, so trying to find a set-up that covered all of those bases was always going to be a nightmare. I had resisted pedals for years, mostly due to not wanting to spend time fiddling with them, and thinking I could find an amp that did it all. But I was unable to get either the clean or dirty sound I wanted out of my Mesa/Boogie Lone Star Classic short head – the cleans sounded muffled and the overdrive sounded compressed and choked – so the only way forward was to a get a really good clean amp and then pedal the shit out of it!"

Tell us a little about the journey...

"After a lot of research, I opted for the Morgan RCA35R and a Blackstar Artisan 212 cabinet as the canvas for my sound. The rest was about finding an overdrive pedal that worked with it, which became a hell of a quest – I listened to scores of them on YouTube and tried out dozens in guitar shops. One day, I stumbled across the Ethos OD and it became obvious I needed to build my sound around it. I could get a fantastic clean sound out of the Morgan, but to get a good OD sound on top of that I had to dial the Morgan back, which muddied it slightly. The Ethos compensated with its clean channel and brought the sparkle back to the clean sounds whilst giving me the OD I had always wanted with its gain channel. The rest was about a decent distortion pedal for heavier stuff. I'm still unsure whether to keep the Rotovibe..."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?

"I think the only thing I would consider at this point is a reverb pedal. The Strymon BigSky appeals, as does the TC Electronic Hall Of Fame (I like the idea of the TonePrint with the HoF, especially if it means I can get Joe Perry's sound!). And possibly a second distortion..."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"A Gibson Les Paul Standard with signature Slash Alnico II pickups, a Fender Road Worn Strat with Fat 50s and a Kochel 406 T-style with Bare Knuckle Country Boys. I also have a bespoke Sean Kochel lap steel with Rio Grande Blues Bar P-90s on its way from the side of a mountain in Montana, complete with bullet shell fret markers. Sweet!"

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Not all overdrive pedals are created equal... before the Ethos I tried so many OD pedals and even forked out for the Lovepedal Les Lius, which I found to be too harsh. It was definitely the Dumble sound that I was looking for and not the Tweed one. I even tried making my own version of a Tube Screamer from a kit, but I suck at soldering. Sometimes you have to spend to get the sound in your head."

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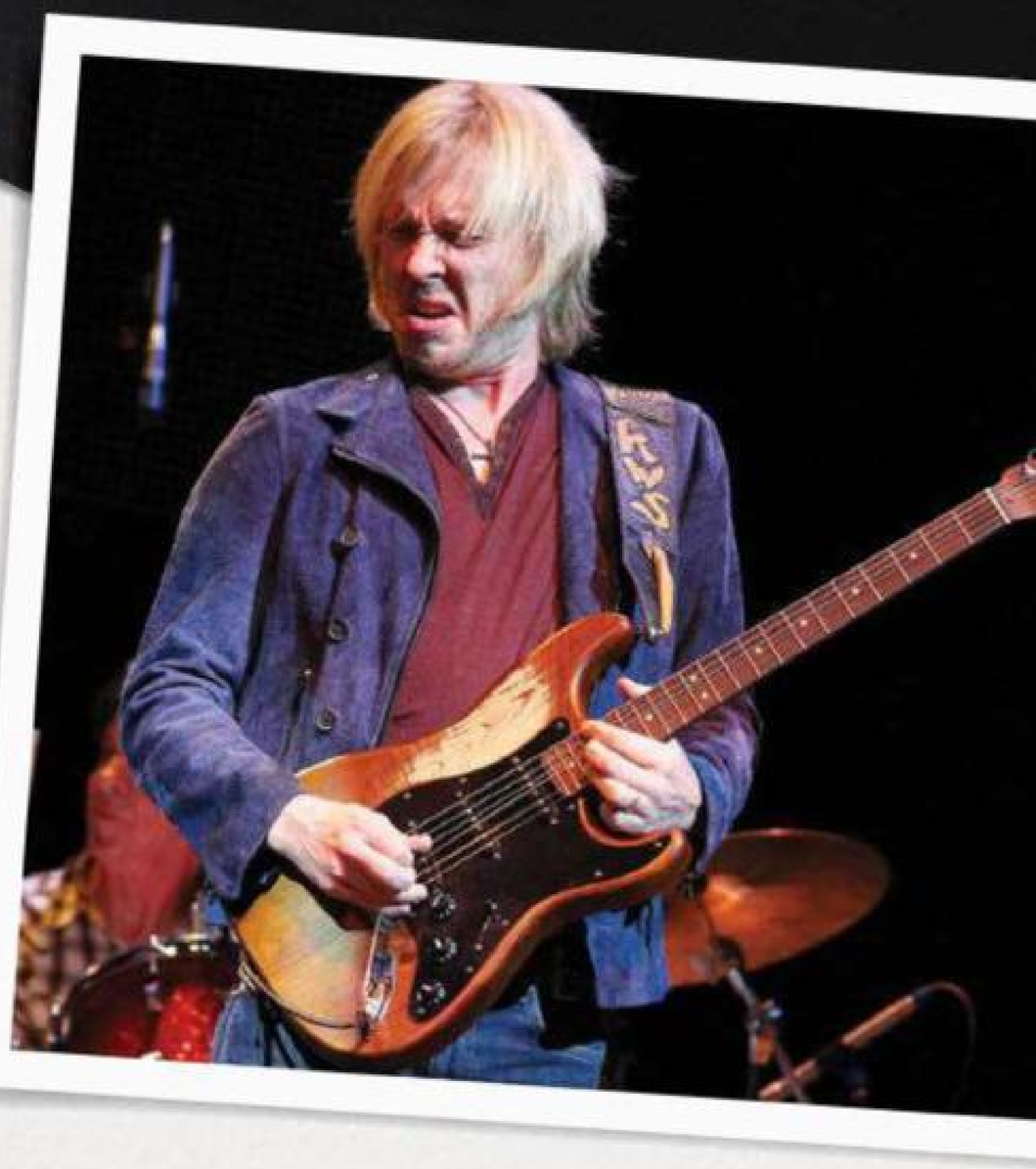
SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Platinum-selling bluesman reveals the albums that shaped his guitar-playing evolution

Since signing his first record deal at the age of 16, Louisiana-born Kenny Wayne Shepherd has been one of the leading lights of the modern blues-rock scene. He has sold millions of albums and received five Grammy nominations and two Billboard Music Awards. Shepherd has recorded with legendary musicians including BB King, Hubert Sumlin, Joe Walsh and Ringo Starr, and in 2013 formed The Rides with Stephen Stills and Barry Goldberg. *For more information on Kenny Wayne Shepherd and The Rides, visit www.kennywayneshepherd.net*



ZZ Top
FANDANGO!

"It's a really great record of partially live recordings and one of my favourite albums. When I was a kid I used to put the vinyl album on, turn the stereo up and jump up and down on my grandfather's bed playing air guitar. I still feel inspired by it. The dynamic of a live performing band on this record is incredible, and in my opinion it's the best Les Paul through a Marshall sound ever."

The Jimi Hendrix Experience
ARE YOU EXPERIENCED

"One of the most innovative guitar rock albums ever. It put Jimi on the map and defined who he was an artist. There are so many songs on it that have influenced so many people, myself included. I really love the title track – the way it comes in is somewhat otherworldly. It has that marching beat, the guitar immediately hits you in the chest and it has the backwards guitar solo."

Stevie Ray Vaughan
TEXAS FLOOD

"He's one of the greatest guitar players of all time and what I like about this is it's just him and his band playing live in the studio. They had crafted these songs by playing them live in clubs for years, they got their opportunity to make this album and just went into the studio and did what they do. It's a power-trio – guitar, bass and drums, not a lot of effects on anything."

BB King
LIVE AT THE REGAL

"Any time somebody asks me about my favourite albums, this is one of them; BB King in his prime doing what he did best, on stage. His vocals are incredible, his guitar tone and playing is incredible, but the way you hear the audience responding to him really conveys how popular and relevant blues music was back then. I'm as much of a fan of his singing as his guitar playing."

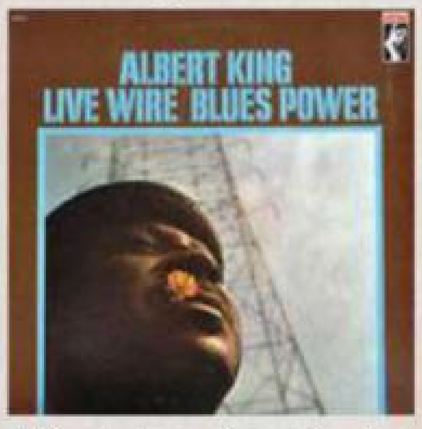
James Brown
REVOLUTION OF THE MIND

"This was recorded live at the Apollo Theatre in New York. James Brown was one of the first African American artists to do a live album and finance it himself. It's an incredible recording and you can hear all these amazing segues because he had so many hits that he couldn't squeeze them all into a live set. The way the audience is responding is similar to BB."

Muddy Waters
HARD AGAIN

"This is my favourite blues album of all time. Johnny Winter produced it and played guitar on it. I think it's one of the greatest blues albums ever recorded. They were just playing it in the studio, there's no overdubbing going on. These guys were just sitting around playing the blues, and sonically I think it's the best Muddy Waters ever recorded, too."

Albert King
LIVE WIRE/BLUES POWER



"This has some of the most searing guitar sounds you've ever heard. Albert King had such a way of bending the strings and a unique sound. My favourite track is where he breaks it down on the title track and starts talking to the audience. The dynamics of that song, the way he breaks it down and then comes back in with a searing Flying V guitar tone is incredible."

Freddie King
BURGLAR

"I think Leon Russell played piano on this record – it's got a really cool group of musicians on it, and Freddie King is in his prime. It's a great collection of songs and Leon Russell lends a unique sound that's a little different to Freddie King's normal stuff. It's got a lot of great songs on it. Freddie King was an absolute monster of blues music."

Eric Clapton
UNPLUGGED

"Eric Clapton has got a lot of great records, but this is one of my favourites. You'd heard Eric Clapton over the years playing electric, but it was nice to hear him in that stripped-back format, and I think that record blew up so big because you could hear him in a different context. When I was young, I was learning about the young Eric Clapton too, and it all had an influence on me."

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25 Tele Tips

For some players, Leo's plank was perfect from the get-go. It also happens to be one of the best modding platforms in all of Guitardom. Not for the first time, **HUW PRICE** gets his screwdriver out...

In its purest form, the Fender Telecaster hasn't exactly put in a bad shift. With a starring role on more hit records than you could possibly count, the ultimate workingman's six-string electric is a 66-year-old design that still feels, in so many ways, utterly contemporary.

Part of the genius of the Telecaster's design is that it's such a simple musical instrument to mass-produce, and it's this modular, bolt-together aspect of its construction that makes the Tele the perfect platform for tinkering, customising, modifying and upgrading.

Whether you covet the mid-rich raunch of the early Broadcaster, the slicing treble of the seventies, that Bakersfield twang or something else entirely, it doesn't take a working knowledge of quantum mechanics to tweak your Tele and make it sound and play the way that you want it to.

Across the following pages, we present 25 tips that will help turn your guitar into a tone machine. Read on, and enjoy... >

Above **A heavy knurl knob**
Below **A control plate with an angled slot**

1 Better controls

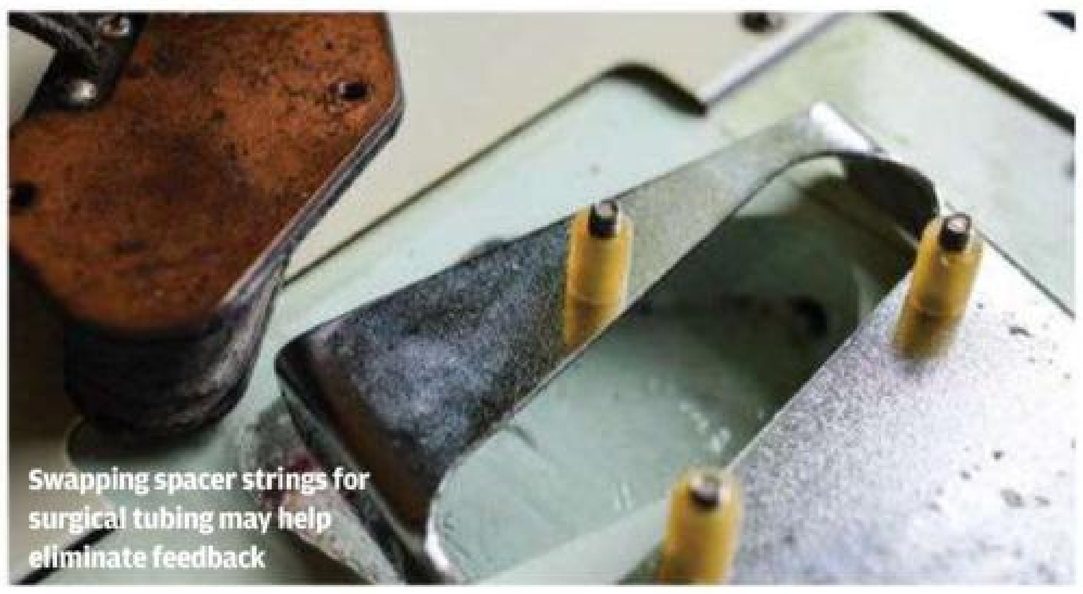
Some players find the standard Telecaster switch less than ideal for speedy pickup changes. The volume knob gets in the way of the switch, especially with the earlier-style switch tip, and the angle isn't conducive for the right arm. Presumably, it explains why Fender changed to an angled switch when the Stratocaster was under development.

If the switch bugs you, consider getting a control plate with an angled switch slot from Rutters, RockRabbit or LsL Instruments. You could also check out slot-less control plates that are drilled for toggle switches instead. Loads of Tele players like to perform volume and tone swells using their little finger to rotate the control knobs, but standard Tele knobs can get a bit slippery in the sweaty heat of a gig, and it's tricky if you have small hands. The solution could be a set of 'heavy knurl' knobs. You can get them from various suppliers, but ensure they'll fit onto your control pot shafts. Far Eastern pot shafts tend to have a narrower diameter.

2 Squeal kill

Microphonic feedback is an uncontrollable high-pitched squealing sound. Unless you're playing in an avant garde New York noise band, it's probably not something you'll find particularly useful. Unfortunately, it happens with some Telecasters, particularly on the bridge pickup, and most people blame the metal base plate.

A couple of simple things may help; firstly, try swapping the spacer springs for 50s-style surgical tubing. You can also place some foam in the bottom of the pickup cavity; it has to be thick enough to press against the baseplate and dampen vibration, but not so thick that it prevents the height adjustment screws from doing their job. You can fix the foam in position with double-sided carpet tape.



Swapping spacer strings for surgical tubing may help eliminate feedback

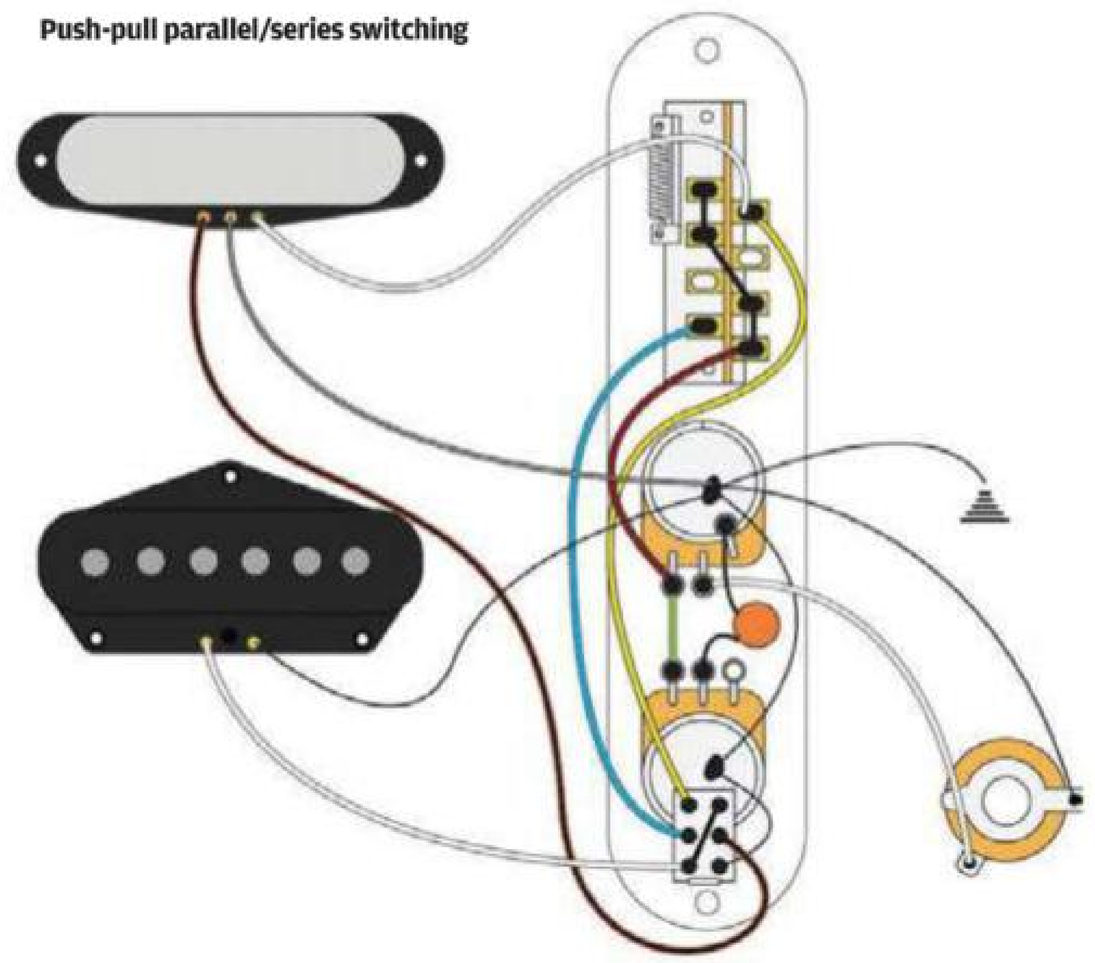
Another useful approach is filling the cavity with foam

3 Parallel/series switching

This modification allows you to get a fourth pickup combination from your Tele without swapping the three-way switch or changing the outward appearance. Putting hum-cancelling properties aside for a moment, humbucking pickups are essentially two single-coil pickups wired in series. Regular Teles have two single-coil pickups, so why not add a series switch?

If you use a push-pull or push-push switching pot, it can be mounted in place of the stock volume or tone control, but most modders prefer to replace the tone pot because it's less susceptible to accidental activation. The new switch selects series mode regardless of the position of the pickup switch, and when you deactivate series mode, the guitar returns to normal. It's a simple mod that increases output and thickens up the sound for those rockier moments.

Push-pull parallel/series switching



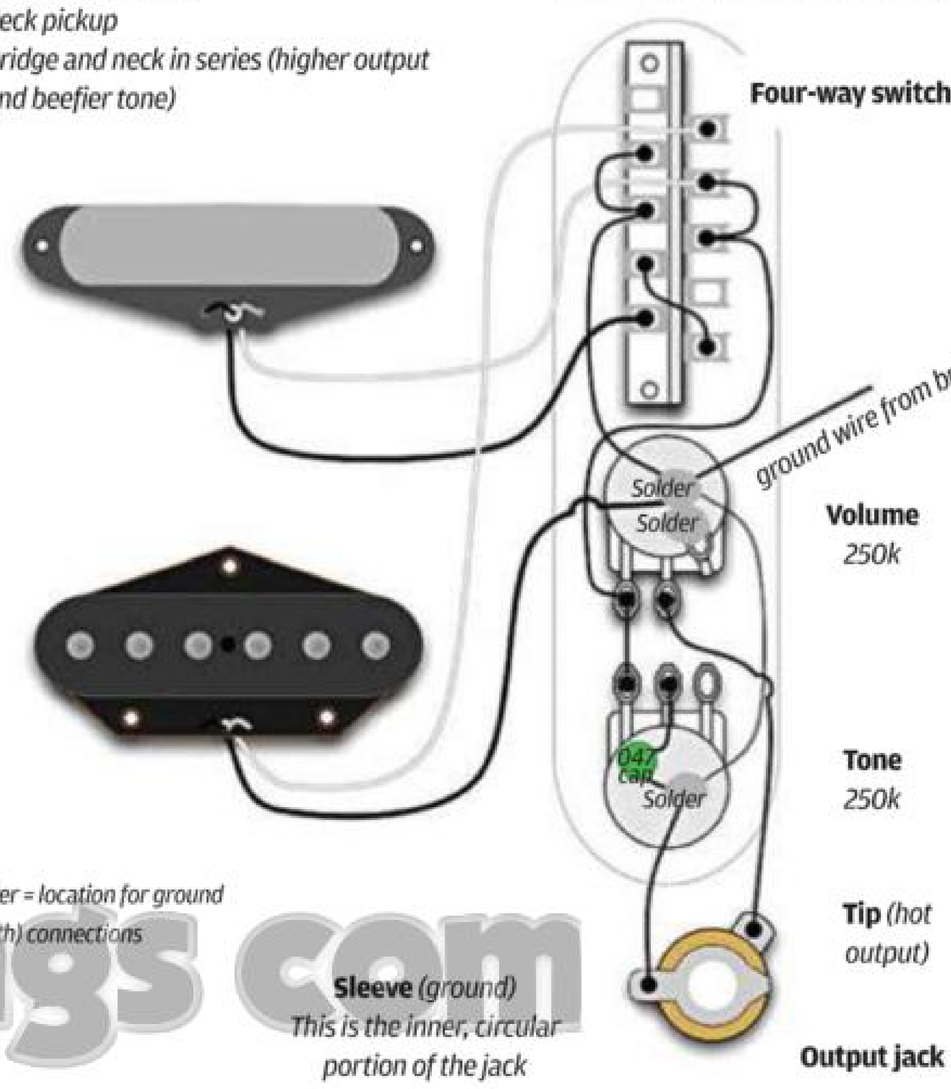
Four-way switch for parallel/series switching

Four-way switch settings

1. Bridge pickup
2. Bridge and neck pickups parallel (normal Tele sound)
3. Neck pickup
4. Bridge and neck in series (higher output and beefier tone)

Important

The neck pickup's cover must be grounded with a separate wire (you will need to disconnect it from the black wire first)



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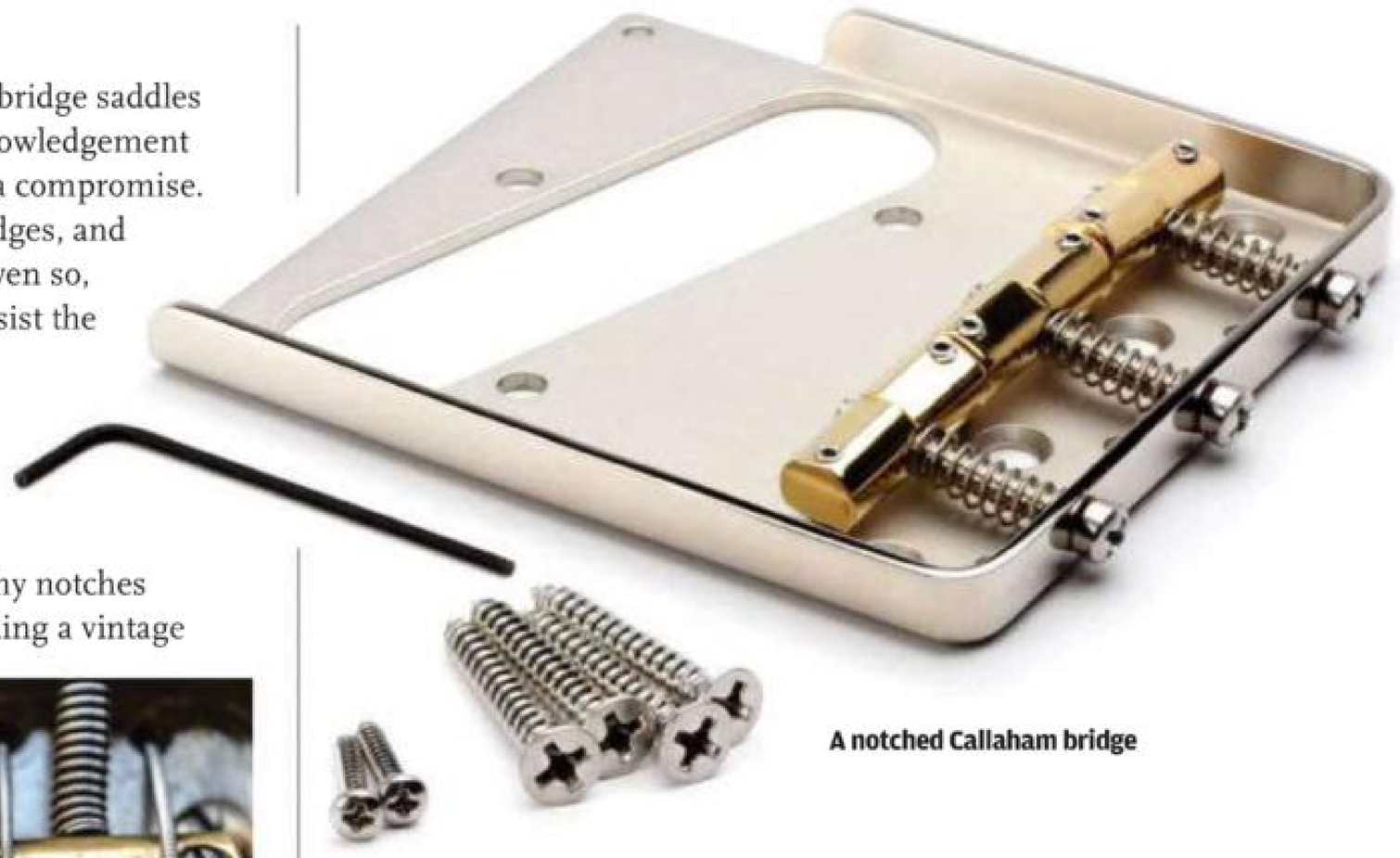
4 Change saddles for improved intonation

Fender's introduction of individually intonatable bridge saddles for the Stratocaster would seem to have been an acknowledgement that the original three-saddle Tele bridge was a bit of a compromise. Nowadays, it's easy enough to find six-saddle Tele bridges, and they're stock items on many contemporary T-types. Even so, many players prefer the traditional look, and some insist the three-saddle design produces superior tone.

Slanted saddles are commonplace, but they look clunky and the strings can foul against the height adjustment screws if the screws are too wide. Instead, try saddles with wedge-shaped staggered take-off points moulded in. Gotoh saddles have stealthy notches that guide the strings. They line up straight, maintaining a vintage appearance and even string spacing. Mastery Tele bridge saddles take the intonatable three-saddle approach as far as it can go, but the non-traditional looks will divide opinion.

Slanted saddles can cause string problems

Gotoh saddles have notches for the strings to sit in



A notched Callaham bridge

5 Bridge plate upgrades

One of the most commonly voiced complaints about Telecasters is regarding the design of the bridge. It was originally intended to have a cover, and the folded sides were there for the cover to grab on to. Nobody uses the cover these days and many players find that the sides restrict access to the strings. You can get Tele bridges with lowered sides or no sides at all, while others, such as Barden and Callaham bridges, have the treble-side scoop Danny Gatton favoured.

Many players also debate the merits of vintage-style thin, cold rolled steel for twang, or thicker steel and brass for sustain. You can even get aluminium bridges. Some also claim that squeal can be reduced if the base of the bridge is perfectly flat and smooth. Alternatively, you could 'go commando' with a chopped bridge and screw the bridge pickup straight onto the body – just as Fender did with the GE Smith signature model.

6 Change saddles to improve tone

Even during the pre-CBS era, Fender experimented with various saddles. Starting out with ¼-inch cold rolled steel, it moved to brass for the Broadcaster. Around 1954, the company went back to steel, this time with string guide grooves, before settling on threaded steel saddles. Tele aficionados will say they all sound different, and the consensus is brass has a smoother, richer tone but steel has a brighter, snappier attack with more growl. Other materials include titanium, stainless steel and aluminium. Aluminium saddles are particularly popular, and some find they give the bright 'acoustic' quality of steel without sacrificing the thickness and body of brass. Other players, such as Brad Paisley, prefer to combine brass on the high strings with steel for the E and A strings to enhance snap and twang. Ultimately, it's down to what works for your guitar. Steel or aluminium may benefit a naturally dark guitar and brass may soften excessively bright pickups.

Some Tele players prefer a mixture of steel and brass saddles

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7 Bridge pickup upgrades

It can't be denied that some players like the idea of a Telecaster more than the actuality. That's not a problem, because a bewildering array of replacement pickup options allow you to combine the Tele's utilitarian looks and functionality with any tone you want.

While retaining the stock bridge, you could try a Seymour Duncan Little '59 for a PAF-like humbucker tone. Or what about a P-90 soundalike from The Creamery, Harmonic Design or Lindy Fralin? Vintage Vibe and Lollar make Charlie Christian-inspired bridge pickups and TV Jones has just introduced a DeArmond-inspired Tele set. If you want to take it even further, replacement bridges are available with full-sized PAF and Filter'Tron cut-outs.

A Seymour Duncan Little '59

8 Neck pickup upgrades

Even Telecaster die-hards will sometimes admit that the stock neck pickup is not the model's crowning glory. By the mid-50s, players had already begun swapping them out, and some of the most iconic and historically important Telecasters of all time, such as Keith Richards' Micawber and Albert Collins' Custom, had humbuckers in the neck.

Given the size constraints of the vintage-style pickup rout, drop-in replacements are relatively hard to find. Even so, you could consider the TV Jones T-Style for some DeArmond flavour, the McNelly T-Bar for P-90 tones or the Vintage Vibe VT-N-BL for Charlie Christian jazziness. For rock and metal sounds, look no further than the Seymour Duncan Hot Rails.

Many modern Teles have oversized routs so you can install any pickup you like without having to cut wood; in which case, it's game on. If you can imagine it, you can bet someone else has tried it. All the usual suspects are proven performers, but adventurous types might be interested in more authentic Charlie Christians from the likes of Lollar, Firebird-style mini humbuckers or a Gold Foil repro from Mojo Pickups.

A Rio Grande Charlie Christian set

9 Potentiometer and capacitor tone tweaks

If you're looking for subtle tone tweaks rather than sonic transformation, experimenting with control pot values is more cost-effective than swapping pickups. Although Fender used 1m pots for a while, 250k is the standard value for Telecaster potentiometers.

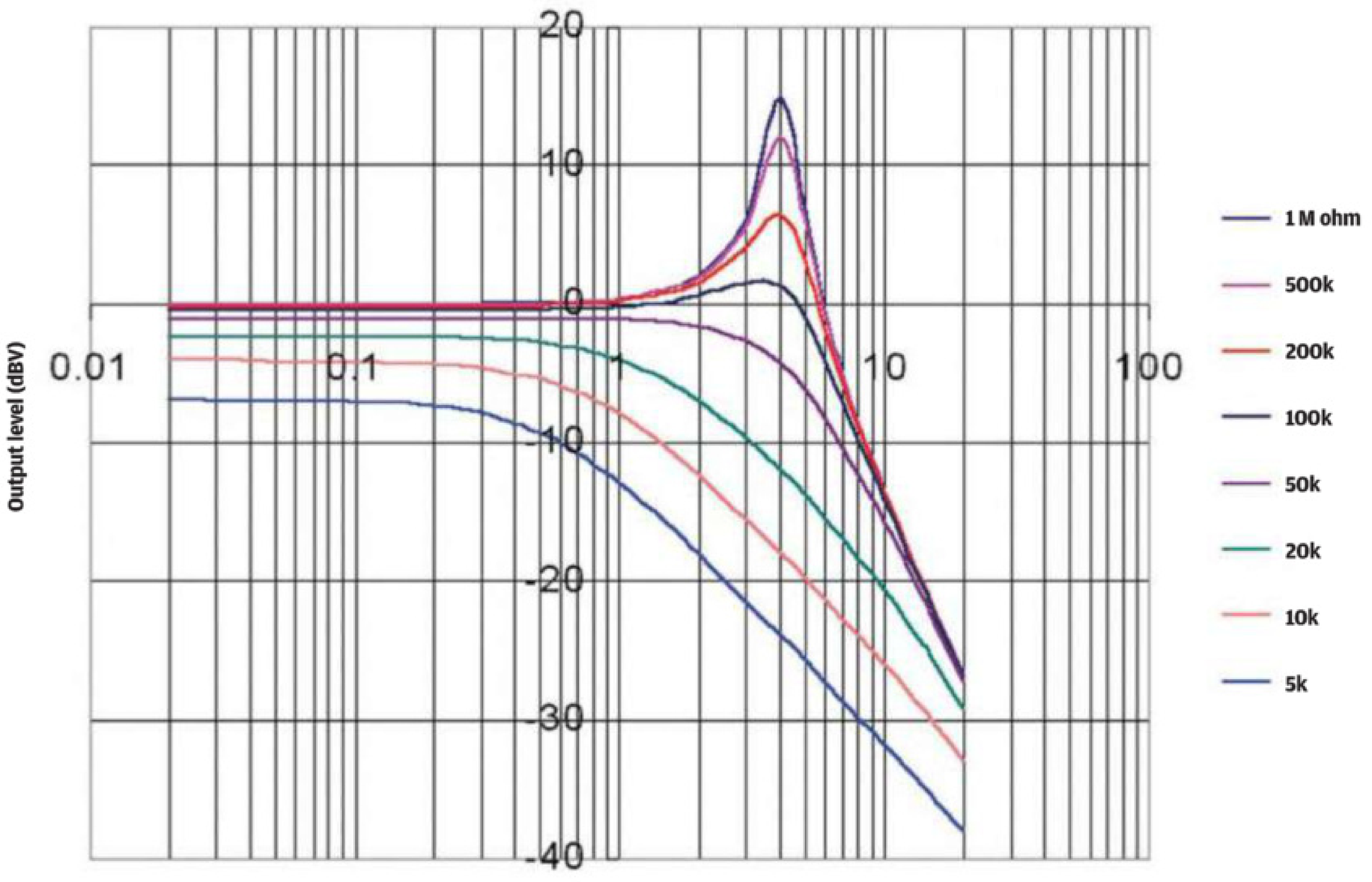
It's commonly held that higher-value volume pots make a guitar sound brighter, which is sort of correct. Conventional guitar circuits have inherent treble roll-off; and pickup inductance, pot resistance and cable capacitance combine to create a resonance peak at the cut-off frequency. Higher-resistance pots accentuate that resonance peak, which happens to be in the treble region with Telecasters. With hot humbuckers, you'll get more of an upper-midrange boost.

The earliest Stratocasters had 100k pots, and they sound very smooth but less shimmery. Few will want to brighten up a vintage-spec Tele, but a 500k or 1m volume pot may drag a tad more twang out of a hot-wound Tele set.

You may want to mess with your tone control, too. Tele types often feel compelled to imitate truck horns and train whistles. Wah effects are popular, too. In addition to pot values, you can experiment with a linear taper to alter the control response or try different capacitor values.

The stock cap is 0.047uF, but 0.022uF will make your Tele sound brighter and 0.068uF and 0.1uF will make it sound darker. The capacitor value will also alter the range of the tone control, so consider hooking up a bunch of capacitors to a rotary switch to decide which value works best for you.

Resonance peak graph



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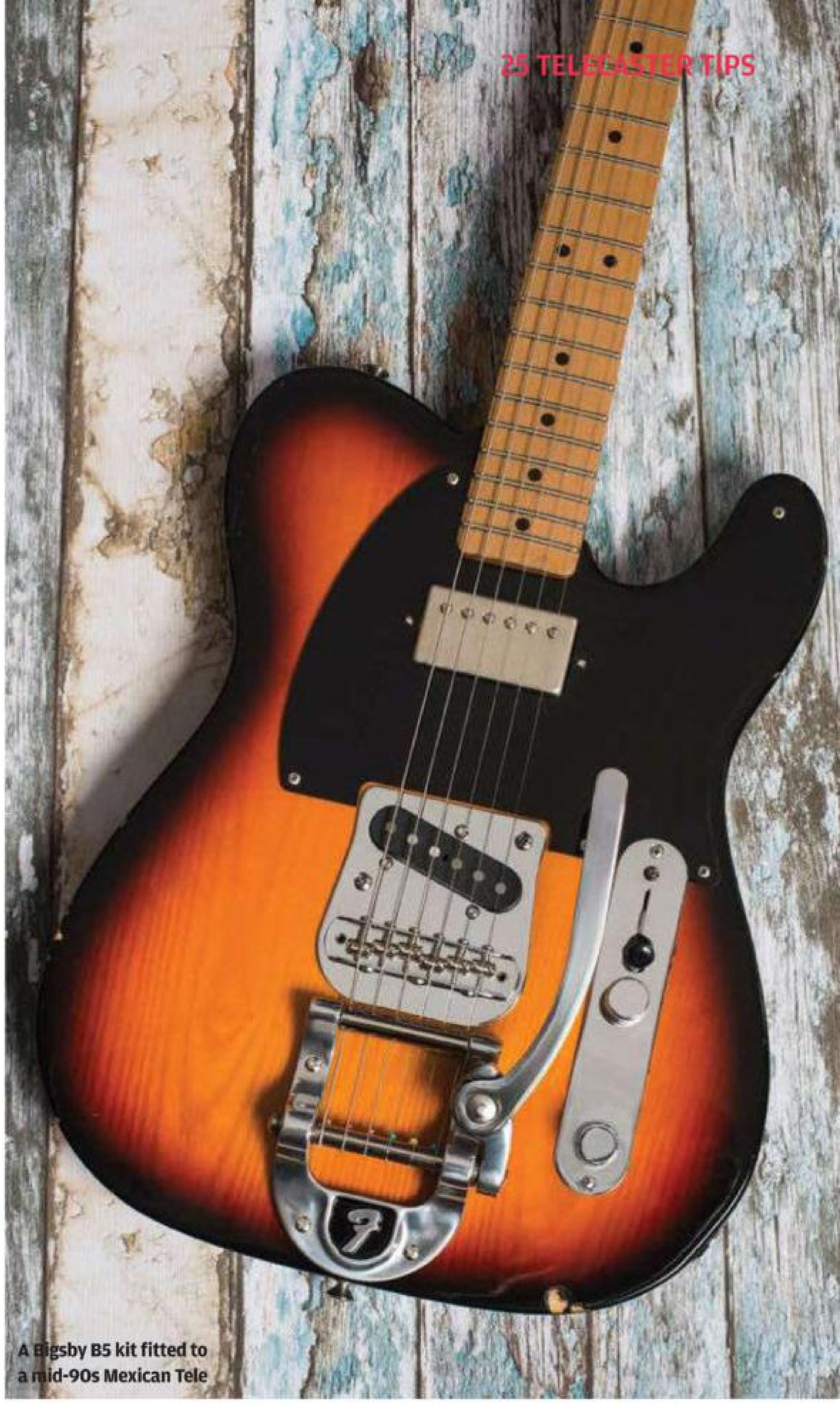


A Bigsby B5 kit fitted to a mid-90s Mexican Tele

10 Bigsby conversion

For many, the Telecaster's structural solidity is a big part of its allure, but there's no denying the model looks fabulous fitted with a Bigsby. There are plenty of options to choose from and much depends on whether you are prepared to drill extra holes in your guitar. If you're not, the only option is the Vibramate system, which comes with a specially adapted bridge and a Bibsby mounting plate that is anchored by the strap button screw.

The Bigsby B5 kit also comes with a new bridge plate and a rocking bridge with six adjustable saddles. The Bigsby itself has a front roller bar and it's screwed onto the top of the guitar. You also need to drill wide holes for the new bridge posts. For a full-on vintage vibe, check out the Bigsby B16 kit. Originally introduced in 1953, this massive casting replaces the original bridge and raises the bridge pickup height. Two holes have to be drilled behind the bridge pickup, with two more above the strap button, but there's no need to drill for bridge posts.

The kit comes with a 3/16-inch neck shim that creates a back angle. This increases the break angle over the bridge so there's no need for a front roller bar. Users report that the B16 has a wider range than the other Bigsby solutions, but the guitar will feel slightly different to play.

11 Neck pickup brightness mod

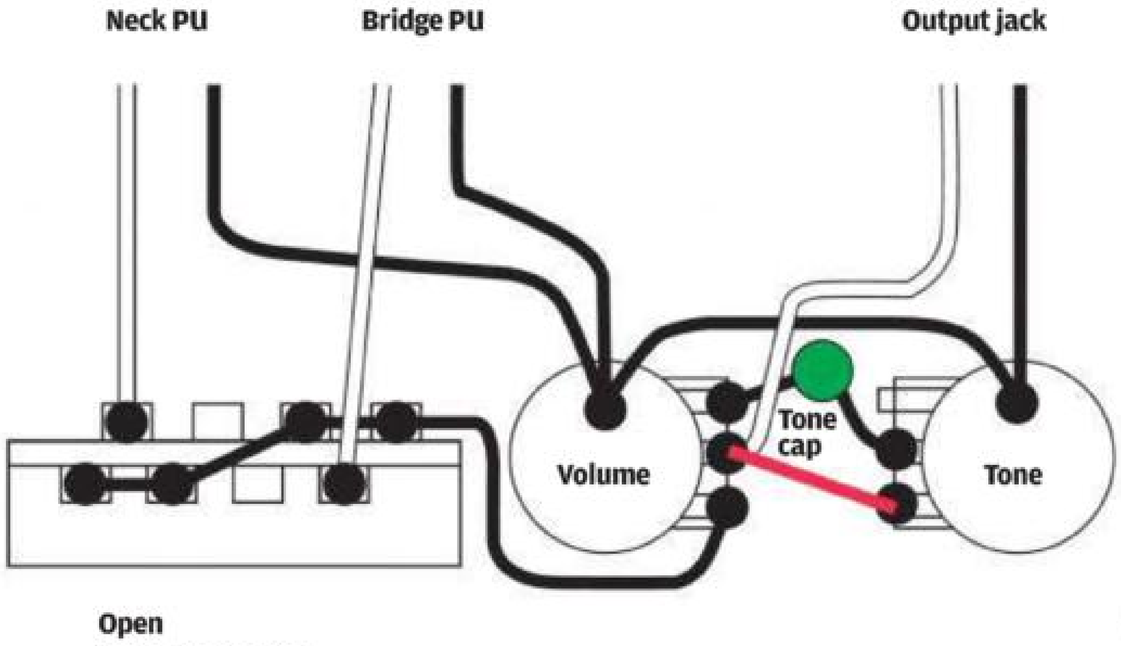
Some Tele neck pickups sound duller than others, and many Tele players never bother using them at all. Before resorting to a brighter-sounding replacement or, worse still, routing out the body and cutting a larger hole in the pickguard for a different pickup, try this simple mod.

The metal covers on traditional Tele neck pickups have much the same effect as PAF covers. To unleash the full frequency potential of Tele neck pickups, just snip the cover's grounding connection. The downside is that you'll experience a bit of noise if you touch the cover, but that's easy to avoid, and the extra brightness and transparency might persuade you to reconsider that pickup upgrade.

12 50s tone pot wiring

One of the lesser-known quirks of 1950s Gibson guitars was the way the controls were wired up. The tone circuit was connected to the output of the volume control rather than the input, which maintains clarity when you turn down the volume control.

Teles are naturally bright guitars, so a treble bleed capacitor over the volume control can thin out the tone excessively when you turn down. Instead, try Gibson-style wiring and move the wire connecting the tone control to the volume control from the outside solder tag of the volume pot to the centre tag. That's really all there is to it. If you don't like the results, this mod is easily reversed.



Open three-way switch

13 Strat-style adjustment

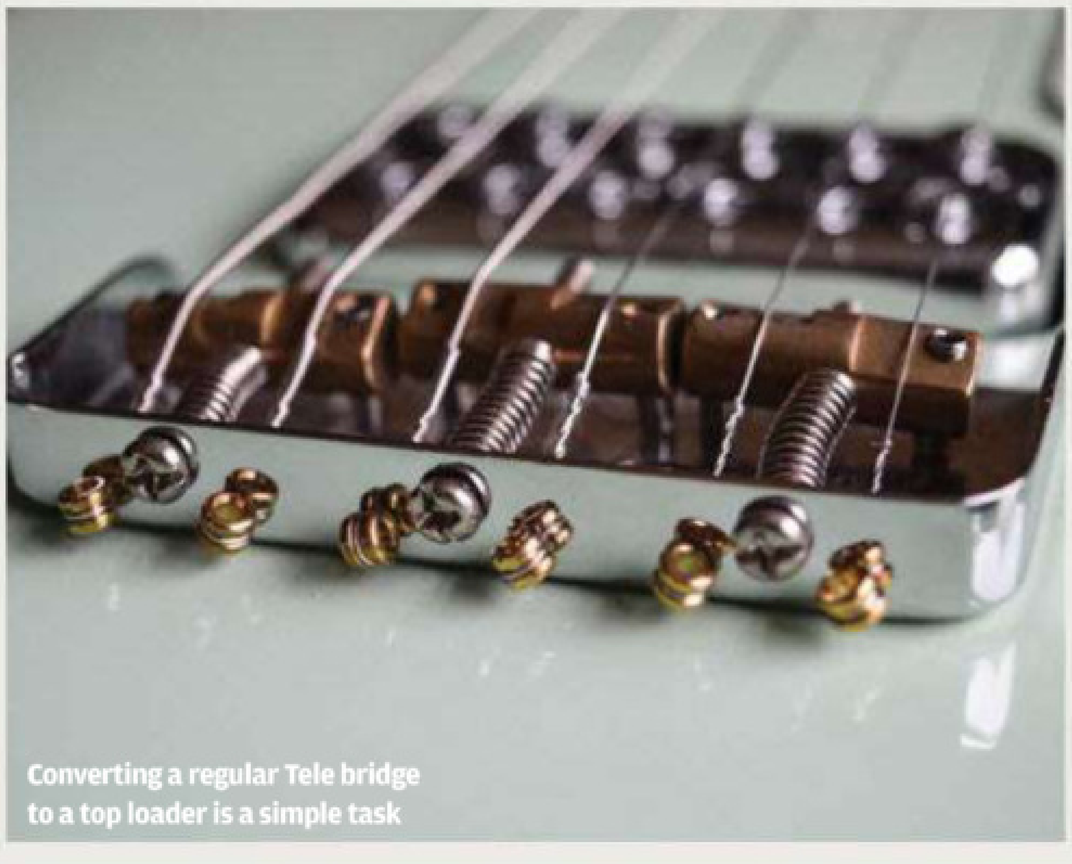
Traditionally, Tele neck pickups have been screwed directly onto the body. This means you are obliged to remove the pickguard in order to make adjustments to the pickup height. By and large, removing the pickguard isn't a huge inconvenience; however, it's not possible when you're dealing with a 22-fret neck with a fingerboard extension.

The solution is to drill screw holes into the pickguard so you can mount the neck pickup Strat-style. Fix pieces of masking tape at each end of the pickup hole, flip the pickup over and drop it through the hole in the pickguard. With a sharp pencil or pen, you can mark the position of the pickup's screw holes onto the masking tape and drill through with an appropriate-sized bit. Remember, you'll need new screws that will bite into the pickups bottom-flat, but you should be able to re-use the spring or tube spacers.

Marking the screw hole positions for a Strat-style neck pickup adjustment

14 Fit a top loader

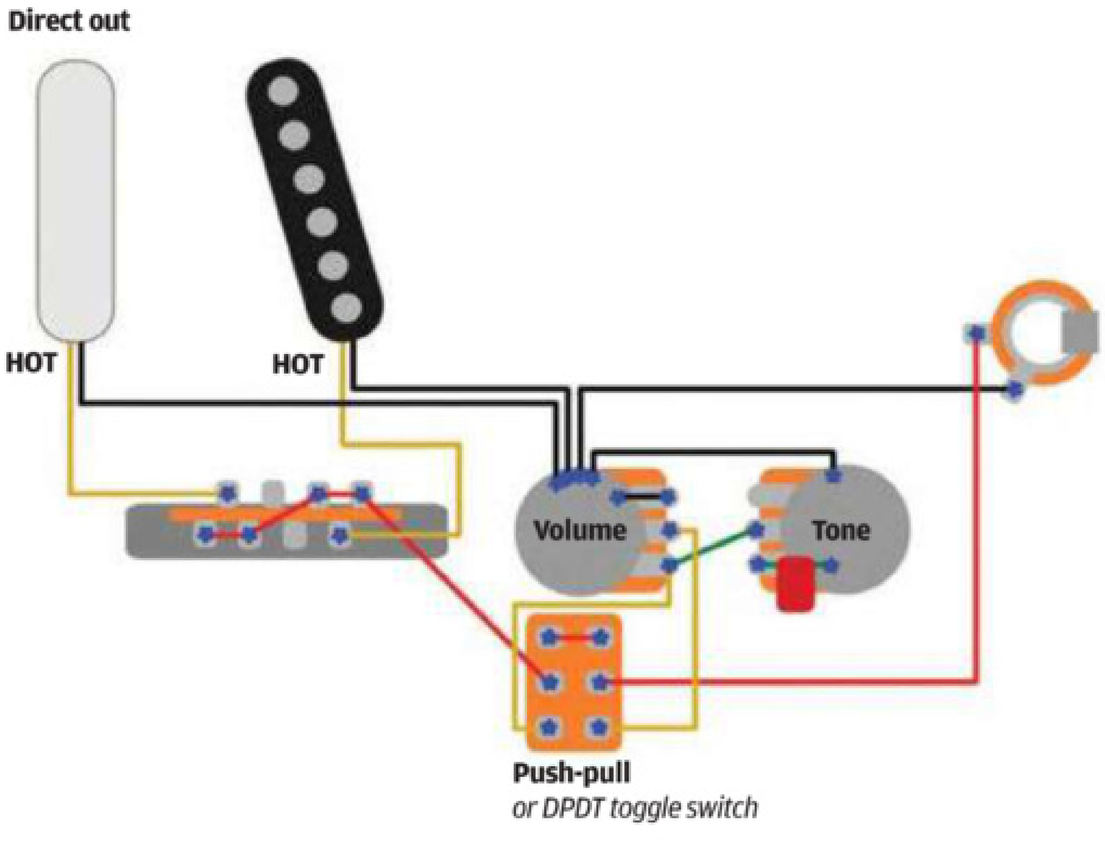
We promise this has nothing to do with washing machines. For a brief period in the late 1950s, Fender ceased through-body stringing on Telecasters and installed bridges with six holes drilled through the back lip. Strings were threaded through the bridge plate instead of the body, and many players feel that Teles with these 'top loader' bridges have a different sound. The most famous exponents are both called Jim – Page and Campilongo.

Detractors claim that top loading reduces sustain, but fans point to enhanced twang, more bite and a ringing chime. Top loading is also said to provide a more slinky feel – much like dropping down half a string gauge. You can buy top-loading bridges, or simply convert a regular bridge by drilling six holes in the back. You could try through-body stringing the top strings for thickness and top loading the wound strings for twang – or do the opposite for solid lows with easier bends.

Converting a regular Tele bridge to a top loader is a simple task

15 Direct output mod

Fender chose 250k pots because they roll off some of the top end. After all, Telecasters are naturally bright guitars and the original ash bodies and chunky maple necks didn't do anything to tame the treble. Even so, the direct output mod has gained favour with country pickers, who often want brighter and more dynamic tone. Rock players might like it too, especially with darker-sounding over-wound pickups, because you get an even higher output level.

This mod involves adding a switch to bypass the volume and tone controls, and routing the output of the pickups directly to the output jack. You can mount a mini toggle switch on the control plate between the two knobs or use a push/pull switch. Alternatively, you can fit 'no load' potentiometers that click into bypass mode. This would allow you to re-engage the controls individually or together. In a sense, it harks back to the original Esquire wiring, where position one disengaged the tone control, or you could equate it to a pedal's true bypass switch.



16 Screw-in jack socket

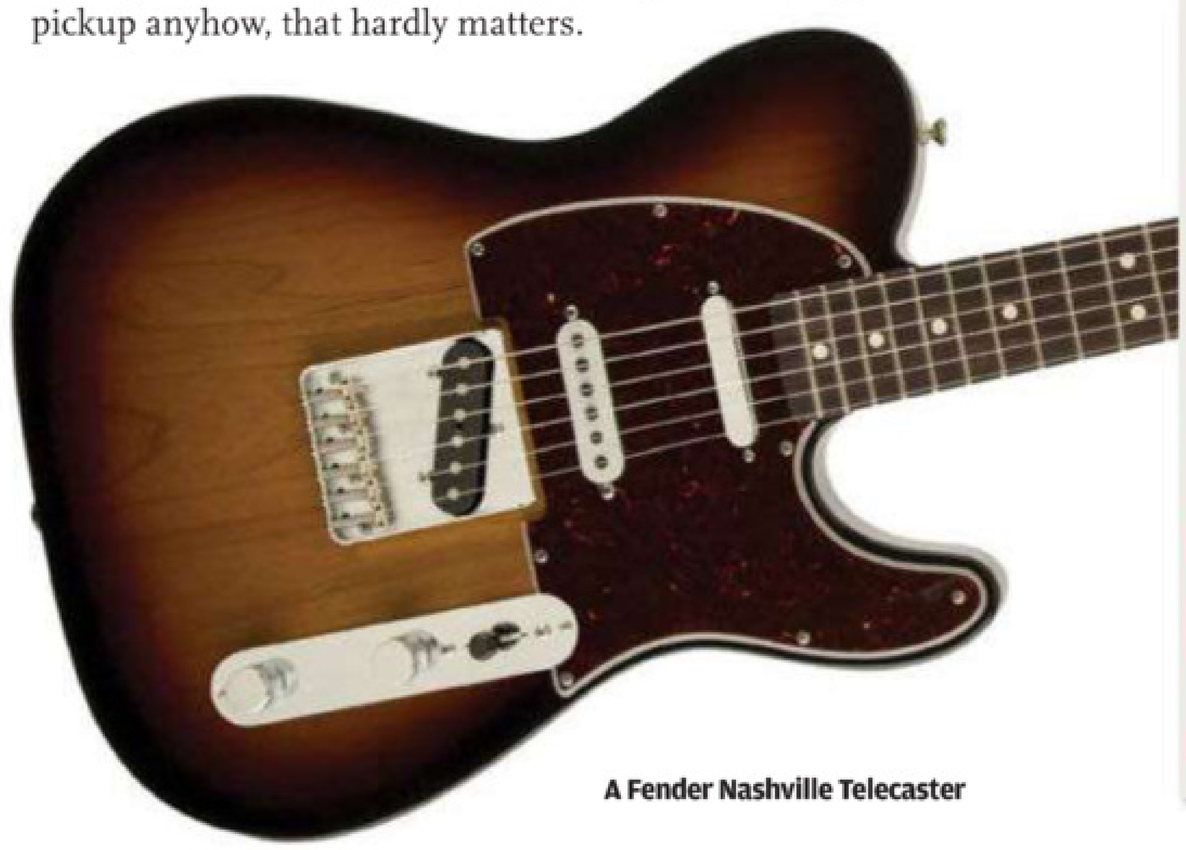
If you have a vintage-style output jack cup and it has never become loose and wobbly, you can consider yourself lucky. The originals have a retainer clip that spreads out to grip the wood as the socket nut is tightened. To do the job of tightening it properly, you need to rig up a contraption with bolts, washers and nuts, or buy a specialised tool from Stewart-MacDonald.

Instead, do yourself a favour and buy a screw-in cup. It pushes straight into the hole, two small screws go in on the diagonal to hold it in position and that's about it. The cup will never get loose, but you can take it in and out at will. Would Leo have considered this an improvement? Almost certainly.

Above **An infamous Fender retainer clip**
Left **The alternative from Electrosocket**

17 Nashville mod

The biggest problem for Fender fans is choosing between Strats and Teles. Understandably, players sometimes want and need the best of both worlds. Although Lowell George installed a Tele bridge pickup in his Strat, it's more common for players to put a Strat pickup in the middle position of a Tele, along with a five-way switch. The Fender Nashville Telecaster is an off-the-shelf Tele/Strat hybrid with an added Strat middle pickup. Some players take things further, with a Strat pickup in the neck position, too. Of course, that will involve even more routing with vintage-spec bodies, but if you're routing for a middle pickup anyhow, that hardly matters.



A Fender Nashville Telecaster

18 Electronics upgrades

Some perfectly good Telecasters of Far Eastern origin are let down by low-quality electronic components. The necks and bodies may be just fine, the hardware is generally functional and the finish may be really good. But if you look under the control plate, you might find cheap mini potentiometers and dodgy plastic-cased switches. For relatively low cost, you can upgrade to an Oak Grigsby switch and a pair of CTS control potentiometers. After 30 minutes or so of soldering, your budget Tele will be packing controls that are identical to those used on top-of-the-line Custom Shop models. Simply download a schematic for Telecaster wiring and follow the diagram.

This guitar could benefit from a component upgrade

High-grade components installed

StoneMaps.com

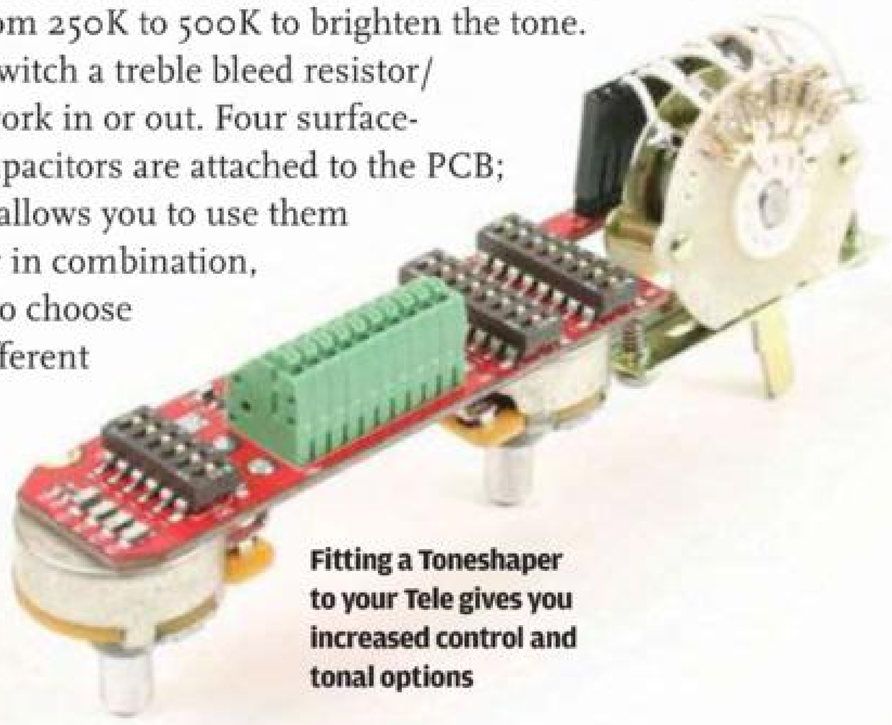
19 Try a string bender

Players were using Telecasters to mimic pedal steel guitars from the get-go, but a certain country virtuoso named Clarence teamed up with his Byrds band-mate Gene Parsons to move the goalposts forever. The Parsons White string bender is a mechanical device that's installed in a chamber routed into the back of the body. The lever mechanism is attached to the guitar strap and it's operated by pulling down on the neck to bend the B string up by a pre-set amount. This allows players to bend the B string up a whole tone while holding chords. Later, Parsons designed the Parsons Green system and the Hipshot B-bender. In addition to bending with the strap button, you can use levers behind the bridge, or even operate a lever using your hip. Hipshot also manufactures toggle levers to alter the tunings of individual strings, and the Doubleshot which changes the tuning of all six strings simultaneously – so you can go from standard tuning to open G at the flick of a lever.

20 Fit a Toneshaper TS-T2-SS

This could be the ultimate in Tele wiring trickery. Most of the wiring mods we have discussed elsewhere in this feature are included in a switchable format on the Toneshaper. CTS control pots and an Oak Grigsby switch are mounted on a PCB that can be bolted onto the back of a regular control plate. All the pickup and output connections are push fit, so no soldering is required and you can simply plug in a three-, four- or five-way switch. They're all compatible.

Three banks of mini switches allow you to toggle the value of the volume pot from 250K to 500K to brighten the tone. You can also switch a treble bleed resistor/capacitor network in or out. Four surface-mount tone capacitors are attached to the PCB; the switching allows you to use them individually or in combination, enabling you to choose between 15 different values. It's surely the ultimate birthday gift for any obsessive Tele twanger.



Fitting a Toneshaper to your Tele gives you increased control and tonal options

21 Swap your neck to change your tone

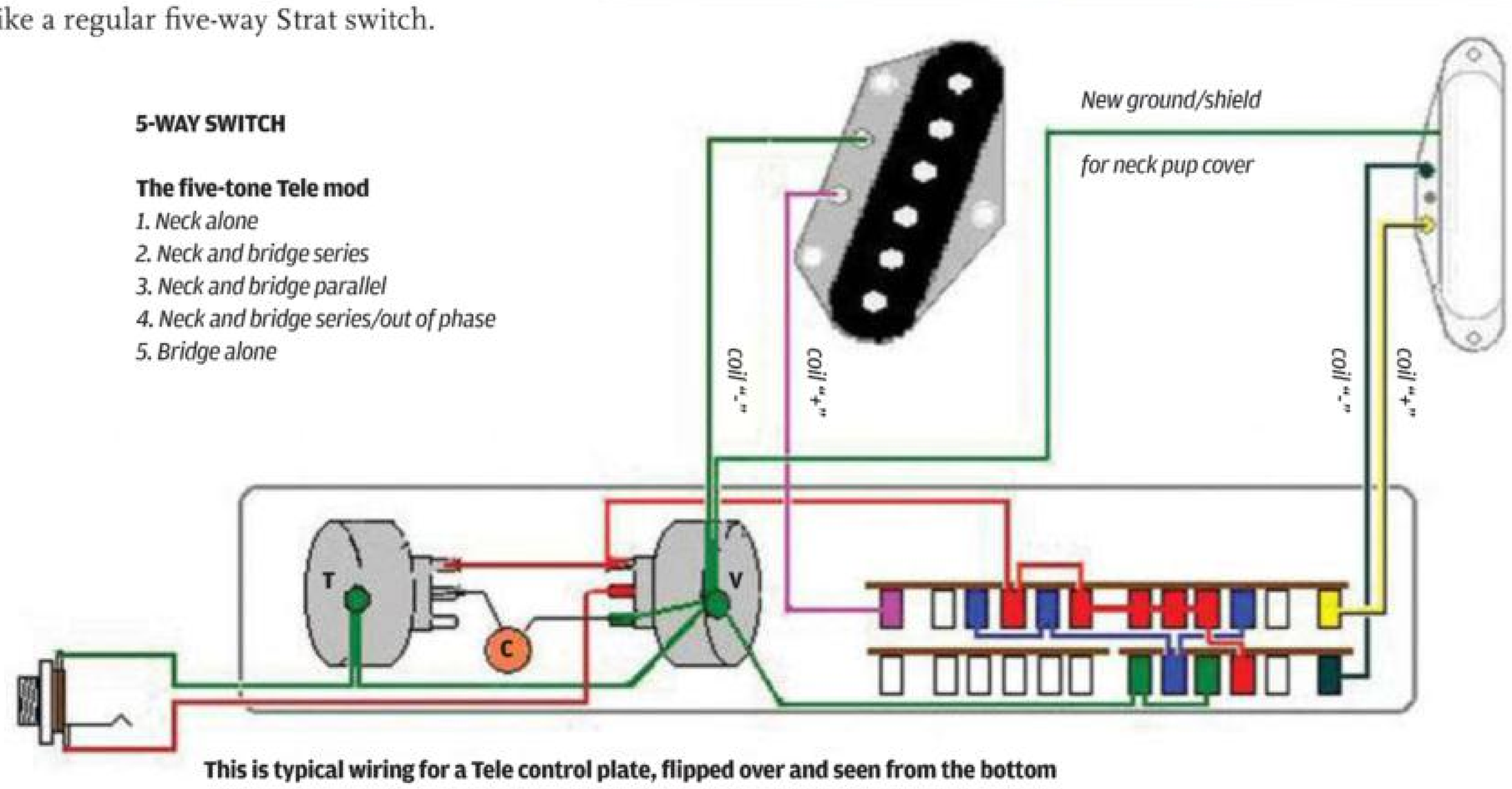
When guitarists talk about neck preferences, most think in terms of feel and playability. That's perfectly understandable, but few stop to consider how neck thickness and mass affect this most 'acoustic' of all electric guitars. The common perception is that rosewood fingerboards warmed up the Tele tone compared to the earlier one-piece maple necks. However, it's worth remembering that Fender was changing the way pickups were being made and swapping over to alder bodies and steel saddles at the same time. The proof comes when you swap between two identically made necks while retaining the same tuners, body, pickups and strings. Having tried this, we can report that the difference can be profound. As far as one-piece maple necks are concerned, we would associate them with clear definition, enhanced sustain and tonal brightness. A slimmer but otherwise identical neck will produce a woodier, warmer and slightly mellower tone. Ultimately, neck size is just one of many variables that influence sound and sustain characteristics, but it's worth considering nevertheless.

Tele neck choice affects tone, as well as feel

22 Install a five-way 'Super Switch'

We have already discussed the series switching mod for getting humbucker-style sounds from a regular two-pickup Tele using push/pull switches or a four-way switch. However, you could also consider the five-way 'Super Switch' for even more tone options.

The 'Super Switch' is unlike a regular five-way Strat switch. This one has two wafers, each loaded with 12 solder tags that are grouped in two batches of six. So that's 24 solder tags in total. Installed in a Tele, the 'Super Switch' gives you the three regular Tele tones and the series combination, plus neck and bridge in series but out of phase. The out-of-phase tone is thinner and scratchier with a hollowed-out Peter Green sort of tone.



This is typical wiring for a Tele control plate, flipped over and seen from the bottom

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23 Spinning the control plate

It may be hard for some people to believe, but player dissatisfaction with the traditional Tele control plate inspired Fender to rethink the control layout when the Strat was being designed. Players wanted the volume control closer to hand for pedal steel volume swells and quick level adjustments. Others found the switch placement meant it was frequently knocked accidentally.

Spinning the control plate around is one of the first modifications Tele players figured out. It puts the volume and tone controls within easy reach and moves the selector switch safely out of the way. If you try this, remember to swap over the volume and tone potentiometers and flip the switch around, otherwise everything will work backwards. This is the favoured configuration for the King Of Dieselbilly – Mr Bill Kirchen.

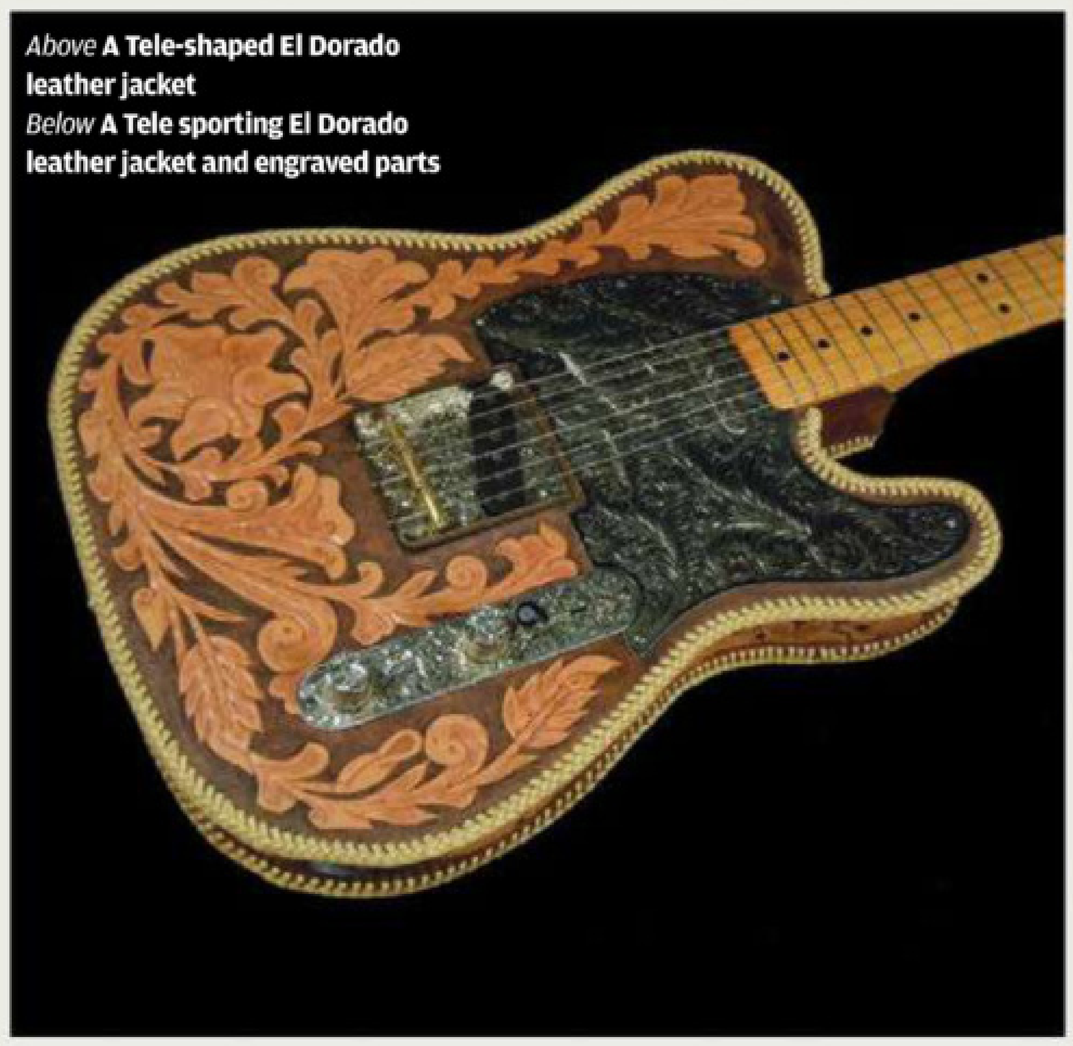
Reversing the control plate is an easy mod to carry out

24 Leather jackets and engraved accessories

We wouldn't dream of suggesting country music is kitsch, but nothing in the guitar world says 'outlaw cred' like a Telecaster in a hand-tooled leather jacket. Waylon Jennings blazed the trail that many have followed, and you can get one just like Waylon's from Mosby Guitars or 4E Custom Guitars, or go for something more individual from El Dorado.

If funds won't stretch that far, what about a tooled leather pickguard or control cover instead? There are plenty to choose from on eBay, and for a swampy blues vibe you could go for faux alligator. If leather isn't your thing, check out El Dorado's selection of engraved parts. If it's metal, they can engrave it, although they sensibly stop short of strap buttons and jack cups.

Above **A Tele-shaped El Dorado leather jacket**
Below **A Tele sporting El Dorado leather jacket and engraved parts**



25 Tuner upgrade

Die-cast tuners can make a light-bodied Tele a bit neck heavy, so swapping them out for a set of vintage-style Kluson lookalikes can improve the cosmetics and feel. You will need a set of conversion bushes to fill out the wide post holes, but with luck the tuners will cover up any unused screw holes. If you're not dead set on having the Kluson stamp, we think Gotohs from a supplier such as Allparts UK are the smoothest and most stable.

Alternatively, you may prefer to modernise with die-cast tuners. Also consider staggered post heights because you might be able to get away without using string trees. That will reduce friction and allow for easier behind-the-nut string bending tricks. If you play in drop D tuning, what about a Hipshot GT2 Guitar Xtender tuner (below)? One of these will enable you to de-tune the low E string instantaneously using a lever, and returning to standard tuning is just as fast.

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Collector's Choice

Few guitarists can hold a candle to Rick Nielsen's guitar collection – or his musical CV. *G&B* chats to Cheap Trick's guitarist about his new album, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and his prized possessions

Story **Mark Alexander**

Rick Nielsen is a force of nature with a cartoon-like persona and mischievous sense of humour. He is also the engine behind iconic pop-rockers Cheap Trick, who have just released their first new album in seven years. *Bang, Zoom, Crazy... Hello* is scented heavily with the winning formula of gutsy, anthem-filled sing-a-longs that have kept the band relevant since 1974. It also validates their recent induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

It was not before time. The iconic four-piece from Rockfield, Illinois have chalked up record sales in excess of 20 million and amassed more than 40 international gold and platinum certifications. Much of their success is laid at the feet of their untiring axeman Nielsen, whose boisterous character is usually as vibrant as his onstage persona.

With a famously larger-than-life character, it was perhaps surprising to hear him voice uncertainty when the topic of the band's induction was raised shortly before the ceremony. "I'll try not to cry but I probably will. I don't know what to expect. It's such an honour, I probably won't say the right things or do the right stuff until after it's over. As much as we've done and as many gigs as we've played, it's like I really don't know what to say, and I'm usually not speechless. You can't usually shut me up!"

The timing couldn't have been better. The launch of *Bang, Zoom, Crazy... Hello* came just a week before the ceremony. Along with the tricksters, other giants of the rock and pop world also received their keys to the industry's most exclusive club. This year's inductees included Steve Miller, Chicago and Nielsen's favourite – Deep Purple. "I was hoping to see Ritchie Blackmore there," he laughs. "We toured with Blackmore's Rainbow back in the 1970s, and Ritchie was quiet but he was always fairly nice to me. We've also done shows with Deep Purple with Steve Morse – maybe I should be their ring leader. I like them all!"

While Nielsen might find brokering a Deep Purple reunion a little tricky, the outlandish guitarist delivers a seasoned performance on his band's latest release, with his trademark brand of punk and mod-inspired licks and riffs. Just as significantly, he indulges in a wide palette of sounds using an array of Les Pauls, a maple-neck Esquire and his trusty Hamer with a vibrato bar. He is, after all, a prolific collector of guitars and amps of all different shapes and sizes.

"I have about 450 guitars, or something like that. I'm not exactly sure," he says. "Overall, I have between 1,500 and 2,000 different instruments, including amps, guitars, pedals and drums."

Nielsen, who began his musical life as a drummer, is famed for his impressive stockpile of guitars. His decision to "thin the herd" last year through Reverb.com grabbed headlines, with his 1956 Sunburst Gibson Les Paul Junior selling for $5,760. While his Reverb shop is now empty and is "on holiday", his personal collection still contains some unimaginable gems.

"My oldest guitar is an 1854 Martin that I got from my dad," he says proudly. "It's a Martin that comes in a coffin case and has ebony tuning pegs that are like violin tuning pegs; there are no gears on them at all. I have a few older instruments like that."

Add to that Fender, Gibson and Rickenbacker lap steels made in the 1940s and you get a sense of the extent of Nielsen's jaw-dropping collection. "My oldest electric is the first Les Paul I ever bought; the 1955 Goldtop."

> "I have about 450 guitars. Overall, I have between 1,500 and 2,000 musical instruments"

Nielsen, left, with his Cheap Trick bandmates

And it doesn't stop there: "This year, I got two or three more Stratocasters and I also got a White Penguin that was actually built for me by Gretsch."

If Nielsen's ever-expanding clutch of six-strings hasn't sparked your buds of envy into full bloom, it's worth mentioning that he has also been working with Gibson to recreate one of his most cherished stage and studio guitars – his 1959 Les Paul Standard. Delivered with True Historic specifications and offered in two finish options (aged and vintage gloss), the first 50 of these faithful reproductions will be hand-signed.

"That's another honour for me," Nielsen admits. "Gibson got in touch with me and took my guitar away to get all the right >

dimensions and the scratch marks – it has faded tiger stripes that are just beautiful. I got asked four years ago if I wanted to do it."

Nielsen continues: "Just looking at it, it sounds good – they're very hard to tell apart. They did an excellent job. The Custom Shop at Gibson really care. I have a bunch of Les Pauls: '58s, '59s and '60s. They're all good, but some are better than others, and this one is just great, state-of-the-art stuff."

The limited edition guitars will include some personal touches suggested by Nielsen himself, including a checkerboard strap and checkerboard handle cover. Apart from that, the guitar has been painstakingly recreated to be just like the original. "Some people make them to their own specs, but I think the specs from the '58, '59 and '60 guitars were just fine," he says. "You don't need to make them any better. They're just beautiful."

Nielsen took the ethos of relic'ing to its natural conclusion by creating a carbon copy of his beloved 1959 Les Paul Standard. He even wanted his nod to the past applied to the guitar's cases; something Gibson had never done before. "You have these guitars that are all beat-up, they're relic'd, they look like the old stuff and then they put them in brand new cases," he explains. "These are new cases but made to look like you've got some mojo; like you've been on the road with them."

This additional layer of authenticity takes the idea of aging instruments into a realm where distinguishing the original from the 'new' instrument could become little more than a chin-rubbing exercise, especially if the cases are equally identical. For Nielsen, it means he can take all the looks, tones and feel of his guitar out on the road without incurring the kind of expensive insurance needed when he brings out the original.

It also adds another artefact to his collection, which continues to expand despite the occasional cull. Nielsen's collection ran to 160 guitars in 1985 – 30 years on, he has nearly tripled his tally in a blaze of unashamed musical indulgence. If any one of us had the funds, wouldn't we do the same?

Despite including some well-documented oddities such as his five-necked Hamers, Nielsen's collection also has depth, as ably illustrated by his 162-year-old Martin. The rarest and possibly the most expensive guitar he owns is a 1963 Guild Merle Travis guitar, which 53 years ago would have set you back $2,000 (or $40,000 in today's money).

Not surprisingly, Nielsen didn't purchase his Merle Travis when it was first released in a run of just three, but he did spend a good proportion of his adult life searching one out. "I looked for one for 35 years," he explains. "They only made three. One that Merle Travis had, a second one, which is the one I have, and a third one, which I have pictures of Pete Townshend playing but now belongs to a collector. That's about the rarest guitar I have."

He continues: "Mine was completely smashed up and in pieces when I got it. I had two of the Guild people who originally built it in 1963, who were then working at Fender, to restore it. When it was done, I was offered a million dollars for it. It had taken me 35 years to find it, so I was going to hang on to it for a while. I never heard back from the guy."

Like many of us, Nielsen has an incurable lust for guitars, which has culminated in a bountiful collection of beautiful and preciously rare instruments. Now, with the Gibson Custom Shop version completed, a new album just launched and entry into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame secured, it would seem Nielsen has hit something of a purple patch.

"I've taken [the Merle Travis guitar] to a few shows," he says thoughtfully. "I took it to John Mayer; he's got more money than anyone and suggested he would like it, but he said he was collecting watches. I got a picture of him playing it. I took my guitar to see Joe Perry and Lenny Kravitz, who were touring together, and I got a picture of the three of us with it. And I also took it to Conan O'Brien because he's a guitar collector. A few people have seen it who could afford it, but I'm not selling it. Not yet."

> "My oldest guitar is an 1854 Martin. It comes in a coffin case and has tuning pegs like a violin"

Gibson's Rick Nielsen '59 Collector's Choice Les Paul

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Church Of Rock

Country-rock crossover artist? Outlaw country star? Call him what you will, Eric Church has made hay with a commercial sound that's a huge draw Stateside. *G&B* finds out what makes him tick...

Story **Teri Saccone**

Although rock 'n' roll may not be as all-conquering as once it was, any rumours of its demise are somewhat premature. Across the pond in the USA, it's been undergoing a paradigm shift; 'country' artists such as Florida Georgia Line, Jason Aldean and Luke Bryan are stepping into the breach once inhabited by straight-ahead rock musicians, drawing massive audiences with their rock-centric riffing and edgy lyrics. The biggest and perhaps the most noteworthy of these stars from a guitar perspective is Eric Church: a bona fide superstar Stateside, who sells out stadiums and, along with his band the Outsiders, regularly debuts in the number one spot on the Billboard charts. Something that's not the norm for country acts.

Church's music has been dubbed 'outlaw country', and with his lyrics about weed, whiskey and the woes of life on the road, set against hard-rocking riffs, it's possible that this form of country *is* the new rock 'n' roll. Experiencing Church and The Outsiders live, we witness a towering Marshall backline and a guitar assault that seduces even the hardest rockers among the audience.

Church has released five highly commercial and critically-praised albums. His music is deeply rooted in guitars and his passion for the instrument is palpable when *G&B* catches up with him prior to his headline set at the Country To Country Festival.

Softly spoken and relaxed, you'd barely know Church is a country music star but for his signature shades. Beyond the southern gentility there also lurks the soul of a rebel. he, like others before him, has alienated the conservative Nashville music brigade with his raucous guitars, defiant streak and innuendo-laden lyrics, all which serve only to endear him to his millions of fans. He even once intervened to prevent a security guard from throwing a woman out of one of his shows.

Church grew up in the picturesque town of Granite Falls, North Carolina, where he was both his high school's valedictorian and basketball star. When not shooting hoops or studying, Church was living for music as a self-taught guitarist who preferred songwriting to socialising. He listened to The Band, Little Feat's Lowell George and, naturally enough, The Boss [his single, *Springsteen*, is essentially a fan letter to Bruce]. Besides those influences, his other inspirations are eclectic.

"My biggest influence is probably one of the most underrated guitarists ever – Jerry Garcia," he explains in a subtle Southern drawl. "Not just with the Dead, but I'm also a fan of what he did in the Jerry Garcia Band circa Old And In The Way era. Besides rock guitars, I'm a fan of guitars in more of a jazz styling and jazz influences, and Garcia was definitely a guy who incorporated that.

"Plus I'm a fan of unique flatpickers like Tony Rice," he continues, "so much so that I learnt every single note of the song he did with [mandolinist] David Grisman, *Russian Lullaby*. Rice is simply one of the finest flatpickers ever. Same with Doc Watson. I grew up in the Appalachian mountains, where we heard folk, Bluegrass and Americana on our front porches. From that, I taught myself to play."

> "I grew up in the Appalachian mountains, where we heard folk, Bluegrass and Americana. From that, I taught myself to play"

In the Bluegrass tradition, Church is schooled in a variety of instruments, including banjo and mandolin. "I grew up playing a host of instruments, but guitar is my weapon of choice," he says, "and it's my writing tool."

Speaking of songwriting, Church is legendarily prolific in that regard, having churned out 100 songs for what became his latest album, 2015's *Mr. Misunderstood*. He explains that the songwriting muse is not always that generous, with that batch of songs coming to him in an unprovoked creative flash that he wisely exploited.

"Normally with songwriting, I'll take my time, try to separate myself from home and family distractions. But this album was totally unplanned and it was different, as the songs came to me so fast that I wrote one song, which immediately led to another and then another and so on. It was almost embarrassing that they came to me like >

Carlos Ruiz

stormguitar.com

Carlos Ruiz

Performing live is Church's greatest passion and he loves life on the road

GUITAR CONGREGATION

Live, Church uses a Gibson Hummingbird with Fishman Matrix Infinity pickups, along with Gibson Les Paul Specials, Gibson ES-330s, a semi-hollow Goldtop Les Paul and a Gibson ES-137 from Memphis. In the studio, he relies on a Gretsch Chet Atkins Country Gentleman and a 1961 Martin 00-28G gut-string acoustic.

they did, and I felt I was losing my mind at one point getting all of these songs coming through me – and they felt like the best songs of my career, too."

"I've had nothing since that happened last summer," Church laughs. "There are no more songs right now dying to come out. Whatever it was that happened last year during that productive period is gone. Nothin' since."

Mr. Misunderstood was released late last year with a giveaway to fans of 80,000 vinyl albums with no accompanying fanfare, nor interviews. "The songwriting spigot was turned on full blast and the songs spilt out for a reason I'll never know why, and no one expected an album at the time," Church recalls. "Rather than putting it on a shelf to fire up the promotion machine, we just dropped it out there. We kept it a secret until the day it came out. In order to do that secretly, without any publicity, we had to buy our own record processing factory in Germany."

Although there remains a north/south cultural divide in many parts of the USA, Church is no Southern apologist. "I am proud of being from the South, and I can't shy away from that and I think it'd be a crime to hide from that," he admits. "I'd prefer people to not like me or my music rather than me pretending to be something or someone I'm not. It's who I am. I'm a Southerner. Period."

What Church has always been on some level is a rebel – a reputation he has built on over the years. He and his band were once fired from an opening slot on tour by then-headliners Rascal Flatts for, essentially, blowing them off the stage.

"I've always been competitive and I am musically competitive too," he admits. "I don't always play by the rules, and maybe we played too long and a little too loud for them."

This admission leads us on to the story behind the aforementioned altercation several years ago with the security guard who tried to throw one of Church's fans off the stage.

"It was a punch/kick situation," Church clarifies. "Thing is, we come from a bar and club background and we played some real dives for years, so I can handle the people where we are now just fine. So I don't need security to handle our fans aggressively."

Playing an average of 200 shows a year has provided Church with the enviable opportunity to jam with a couple of his guitar heroes whilst on the road.

"There were a couple of times I was lucky to have that happen," he concurs. "I did a Mavis Staples tribute one night and got to play with the amazing Joe Walsh and Derek Trucks, and that was a total blast. More recently, I got to play with Warren Haynes and we did *The Weight* [by The Band]. I've heard that a thousand times and I'm sure it's the same for Warren, but I swear being on that stage that night hearing his solo on that was one of the greatest solos I've heard in my life. So yeah, I've had a few of those situations

where I played with guys I am a huge fan of, and I'm a huge Allman Brothers and Gov't Mule fan, so playing with Warren was an honour."

Although Outsiders guitarist Driver Williams plays the lion's share of the lead parts live, with Church mostly on acoustic, Eric did undertake a fair portion of the lead contributions on *Mr. Misunderstood*, with the odd alternative tuning thrown in.

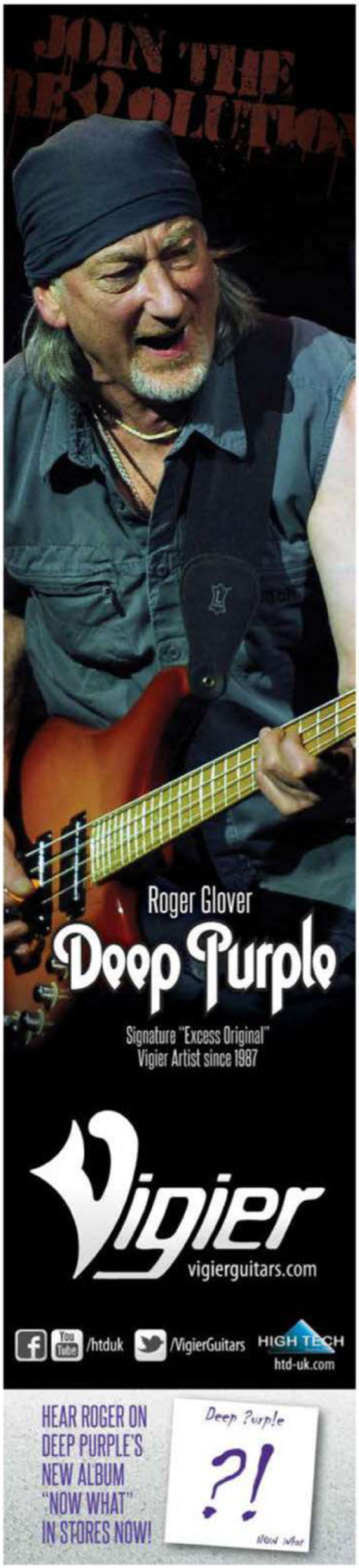
"My favourite tuning is drop D, and I'll put a capo around that," he explains. "Sometimes I'll play open D and open G. Other than that, it's standard tunings pretty much."

Church proclaimed recently that "All genres are dead", interpreted as an attempt to sum up his belief in the futility of labelling art and a nod to the way most of today's younger fans consume music.

He says: "It can mean both, although I really meant the way that people listen to music has changed, and the way young people listen to music has drastically changed, whether it's on an iPhone or Spotify, the way people now hear music is not genre-based and they're not listening by genre. They listen to music for the sake of music. When we grew up, we had specific radio stations, specialised MTV channels for different music and such. All that is gone."

Church has amassed a slew of music industry awards, yet he isn't concerned with accolades. For him, it's all about the joy of performing live.

"As much as I think it's great to win awards, it's never the reason I make music," he says. "For me, the pinnacle is walking out there every night and playing songs and having everybody singing back to us. For me, the focus is on strapping on my guitar, going out there and playing. That's what's really important. It's a privilege."



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Laurence Harvey

1 Dig deep for an earthy tone

"Obviously, I'm using tube amps and that's a big part of it but, for me, my trick is to boost the signal before the guitar gets to the amp. I use a two-knob Keeley compressor pedal, but I'm not using it as a compressor at all. I turn all the compression off and just turn the volume up really high on the pedal, so all it is doing is boosting my signal. That stays on all night. By the time it hits the amp, there is a lot of signal hitting those tubes. This is my clean sound, so if I have the volume on my guitar turned up full on my Strat, there's a slightly broken-up tone on the amp. For me, the biggest thing is to get as much signal as you possibly can to hit the front end of the amp. For me, that was a big revelation. I also like to over-spec my speakers in my cabinets, so if I am using a 50-watt head I'm using EVM-12Ls, 200-watt speakers. It's an old trick – Stevie Ray Vaughan and Joe Bonamassa and all these guys with great tone have been doing it for years – but I've found it to be the biggest tonal change I've ever done. You can have the amp flat-out and you've always got a smooth sound because the speaker is idling; it's never taking the strain. It's such a fantastic thing to do to improve your tone. The tonal difference is incredible. The reason it took me so long to figure it out was because in South Africa it is tough to get your hands on a set of EVM speakers and it's really expensive to ship them in because they're so heavy. I managed to get my hands on a pair and have never looked back."

Bakkes Images

10 TOP TIPS *Dan Patlansky*

With face-curling licks and monster tone, Dan Patlansky is one of a new breed of superlative blues guitarists. Here, he gives us his top tips

Interview **Mark Alexander**

Getty Images

Patlansky draws inspiration from classic rock bands such as Led Zeppelin

> "For me, the biggest thing is to get as much signal as you can to hit the front end of the amp"

2 Change string gauges slowly

"The biggest thing to look out for is balancing playability with the tone thing. In my opinion, your tone's not going to be great if you put a heavy set of strings on your guitar and you can't play it. If the string is so thick you can't vibrate it or you're not comfortable on it, then your tone is going to suffer severely. So, for me, it's always a balance between having a thick enough string where there is enough wire oscillating above the pickup, and playability. And I think playability should come first because if it's playable, your tone is automatically going to be better. Also, when you go up a string gauge, you should really go up a string gauge at a time. You shouldn't go up from 9s to 13s in one shot because you're going to get tendonitis instantly and you're going to hate playing the guitar. Give yourself enough time to get used to the gauge."

3 Listen to more music

"My core is the blues. I went through a decade of only listening to 12-bar blues. I was a blues disciple, but I've also listened to classic rock stuff like Led Zeppelin, or more contemporary stuff like Beck. The more stuff you listen to, the easier it is to come up with a different sound or something slightly fresher. I produced all my early albums myself, but I have found massive merits in getting a producer on board because they bring so much to the table. They're not playing on the album, and look at it from a different angle. To bring freshness into the songs, it is good to have someone not connected to the band. I also don't worry about keeping it blues, or rock, or jazz – it's about writing a song and playing what best serves that song."

4 Tailor your practice

"I still practise scales, but not as much as I should do. I definitely practise pentatonic sequences in groups of sixes and fives, like an Eric Johnson kinda thing. I find the merits of practising that kind of thing are priceless. It really gets you going. When I solo, I never run up and down a scale. That's not how I approach soloing at all. When I practise, I keep >

John Bull

5 Warm up creatively

"A big part about warming up is not playing what you're about to play. I don't want to sound like a hippy, because I'm definitely not a hippy, but if you warm up with licks you're about to play, it puts your mind in a headspace where you are too conscious of what you are playing – you're over-thinking it. You criticise what you're playing on the spot and that's always a bad thing. I try to warm up with something slightly creative by writing a new lick or a song. It's about trying to tap into a more creative headspace and not worrying about what I'm about to play. I don't actually play exercises, patterns or scales. I try to play something creative and new."

> "If you solder a capacitor onto your volume knob you can get so many different textures"

6 Experiment with your volume knob

"For me, I can get so in tune with a particular neck and a guitar that it feels weird to change guitars in the middle of a show. The longer you stick with one instrument, the better you'll know it and the better you'll play it. It will become like an old pair of underpants. Also, if you solder a capacitor onto your volume knob – it's a cheap thing to do – you can get so many different textures just by turning your volume knob up and down. Every notch of the volume knob has completely different tonal textures. The lower my volume goes, the more jangly my sound becomes because of the capacitor. On a standard Strat, when you pull the volume back the sound becomes muffled like the top end has been shaved off. As soon as you put a capacitor on and you take your volume down, it starts to bleed treble back into the circuit, so you get more of a silvery texture. Just in your volume knob there is a world of different textures. It's endless."

Neil Whitcher

it relative to what I'm actually going to play. If I'm looking at a minor pentatonic scale, I'll look at sequences of notes because it's great for technique, but it's also something you can use in a solo. As long as it's relevant to something I can play in a solo, I'll practise it."

7 Work on hybrid picking

"The way that I developed it was to take basic chords and arpeggiate them holding the pick between my thumb and index fingers, and using >

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my other three fingers and slowly but surely picking the strings. You've got to start slowly and it can be painful, but you've just got to keep going. Just picking out those chords – not any country runs or single-note line stuff. Before you know it, that picking will become comfortable, and then slowly you can start introducing some licks. It gives you different tonal textures and you can increase your speed because you've got more picks. If you use hybrid picking, you've effectively got four picks, so you can really increase your speed dramatically."

> "The longer you spend on the same rig, the better your tone is going to be"

8 Find the right plectrum for you

"You should really experiment with plectrum thickness and sizes. I find that not using the pointy end has big tonal impact and makes playing a lot easier. With a classic teardrop-shaped pick, I use one of the rounder sides because I find that way I don't get tangled in the strings, which makes it a lot easier to play. I use Fender heavy picks; they're not crazy thick, but they are thick. I used to file my picks down, because they were too pointy for me. I found by shaving the pick down, I wasn't getting caught in the strings. Eventually, though, I decided to turn the pick around instead of getting the nail file out, and it worked. You should definitely give it a go!"

10 Stick with it

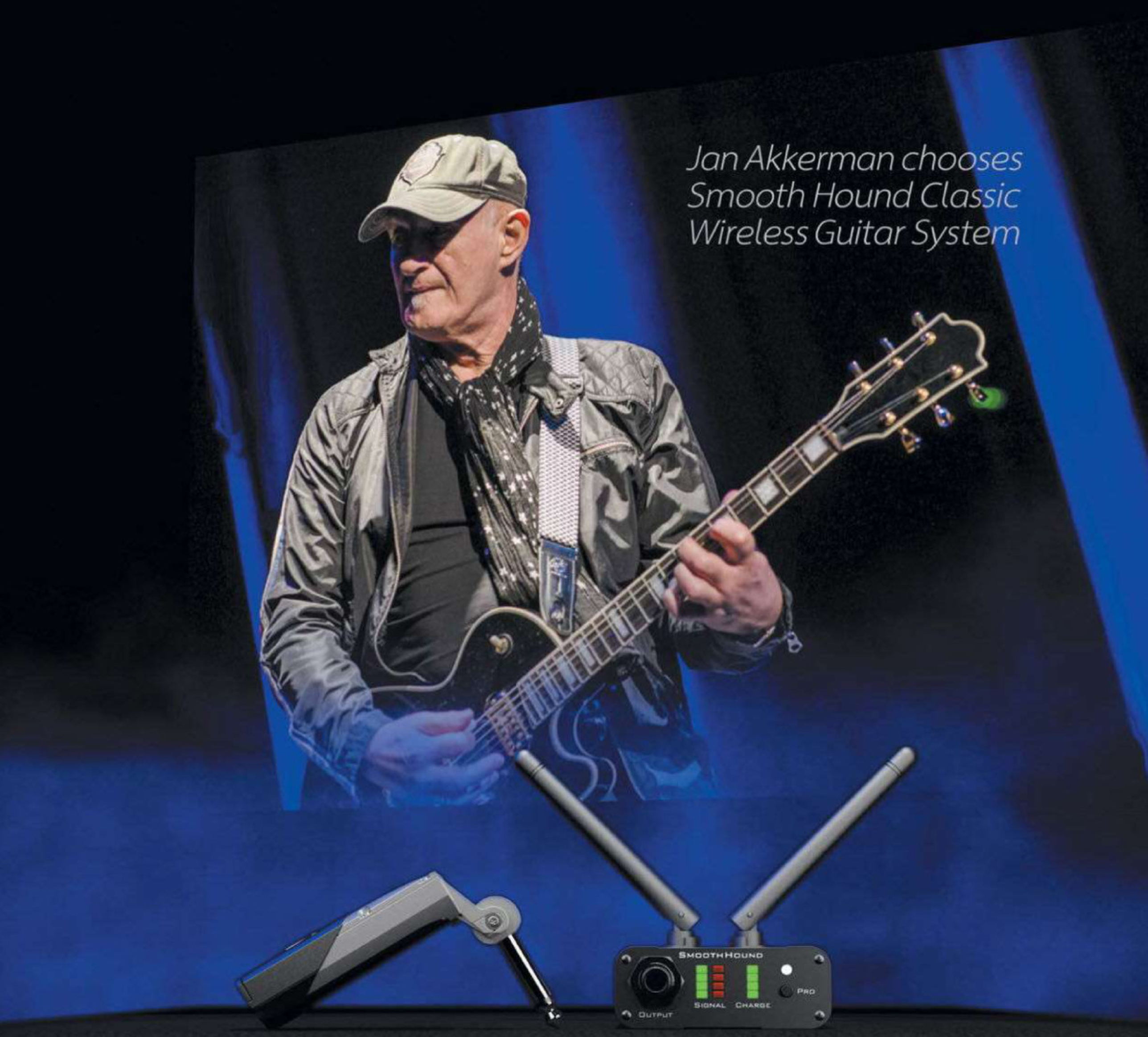
"Committing to your setup and getting to know your kit is important. We spend our lives changing amps and guitars and you never get to grips with them. The longer you spend on the same rig, the better your tone is going to be and the more you're going to understand your rig. It's a thing a lot of people fall short on. I'm a big fan of Dr Z amps. I got my first one seven years ago, and it took me two years to really get to into that amp and understand it."

Dan Patlansky's new album, *Introvertigo*, is released on 6 May

9 Play outside the blues

"I come from the blues, so the minor and major pentatonic scales are my bread and butter. I see the notes in the pentatonic scales as safe notes which are always going to work, and all I do is start adding in the notes in between the pentatonics and the notes outside them until I have a chromatic scale. I slowly but surely start adding in one note at a time. The key is to know where your safe notes are and always be able to see your pentatonic scales on your neck, so when you get into trouble you know how to resolve it. By slowly adding those notes in between the pentatonics and around the outside, it really starts adding texture. So if I want to add tension to the music, I start adding more of those inside and outside notes. The more you do it, the more you know which notes are easier to use. That's the way I like to look at it. It's a very simple way of looking at it."

Stephen Fourie



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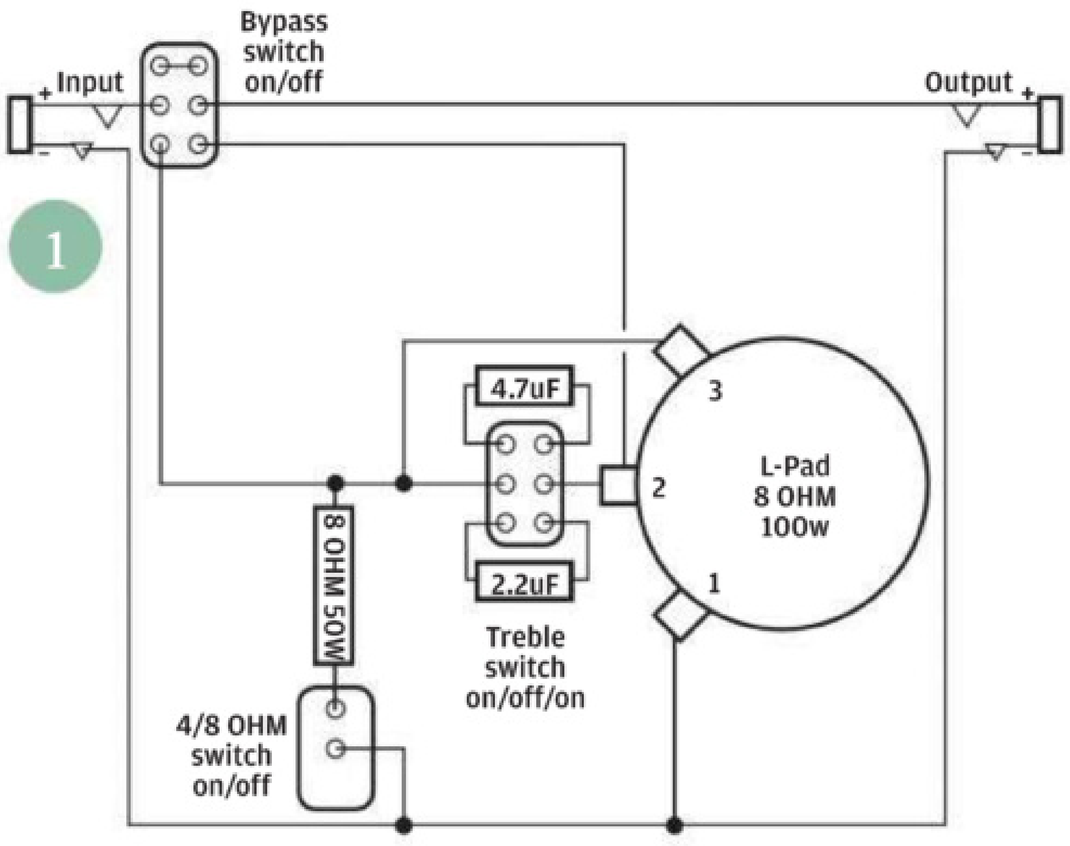
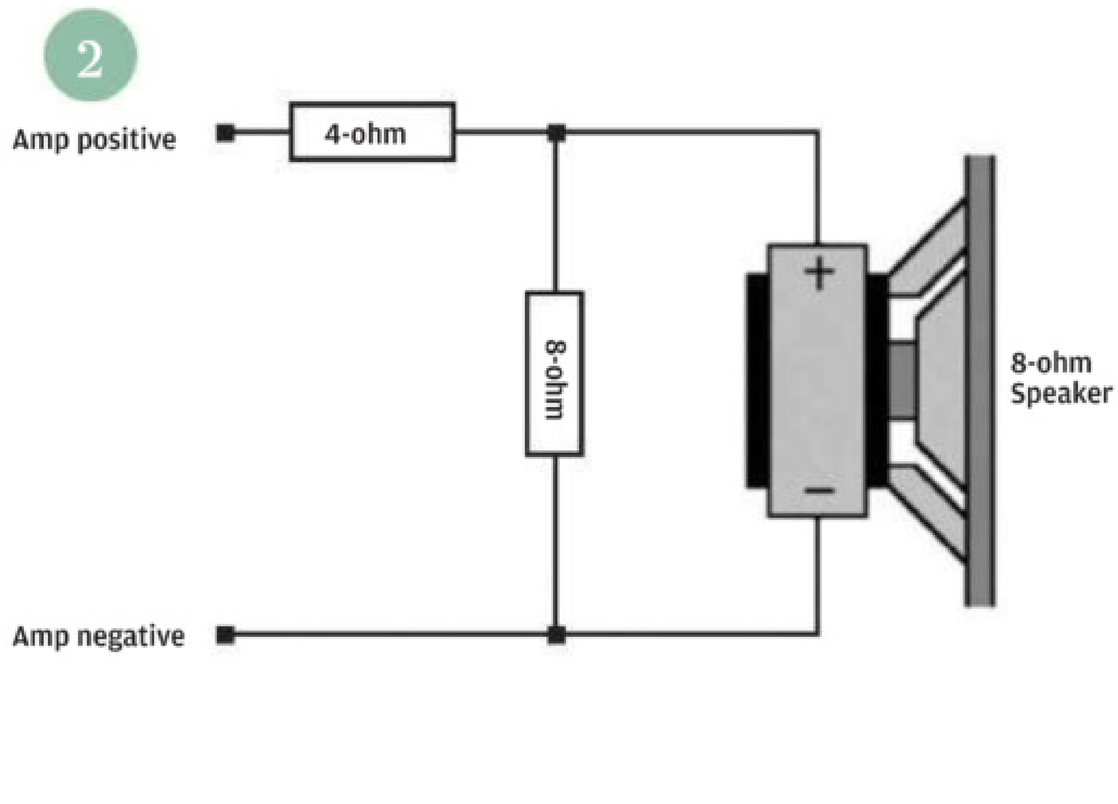
DIY WORKSHOP

BUILD YOUR OWN ATTENUATOR

Why the 'Elevenator'? Because this is the attenuator that goes down to eleven. **HUW PRICE** shows you how to build a simple passive attenuator with impedance switching and treble response adjustment, all for less than £40...





1 The complete circuit diagram for our attenuator

2 Combining the speaker and the 8-ohm resistor in parallel creates a 4-ohm load. Adding the 4-ohm resistor brings the load back up to 8 ohms but the signal is attenuated by around 6dB

3 The L-Pad we bought came with fixings and a nice big control knob. Make sure you buy the right L-Pad for your needs; this one was rated at 8 ohms and can supposedly handle up to 100 watts

4 For the impedance switch, we recycled an on/off from an old speaker. The enclosure, non-polarised electrolytic capacitors and high-power resistor came from various different suppliers

The 'All About... Attenuators' feature we ran in the February issue got me thinking. I had never seriously considered buying an attenuator because I play mostly through low-ish power valve amps and I've always been fairly happy using an overdrive pedal or an amp modeller for low-volume jamming and practising at home.

However, I like high-power amps too, and to do them justice they need to be cranked up. Courtesy to family and neighbours restricts the amount of time I can spend playing them at or near full volume. There's also the issue of long-term hearing damage to consider.

The upshot is that while researching the attenuator article I discovered plenty of guitarists have been building their own. So I spent some time investigating various designs and features, sourcing parts and experimenting with components.

The result is a design for a bypassable resistive attenuator that can work at 4 or 8 ohms and features treble compensation. This is one of the easiest DIY projects we have covered in *G&B* so far. All the parts are easy to find, and for a few hours' work and relatively little outlay you can build an attenuator that would cost £100 or more to buy. All you really need is pliers, a soldering iron, an electric drill and a step cutter bit.

The L-Pad

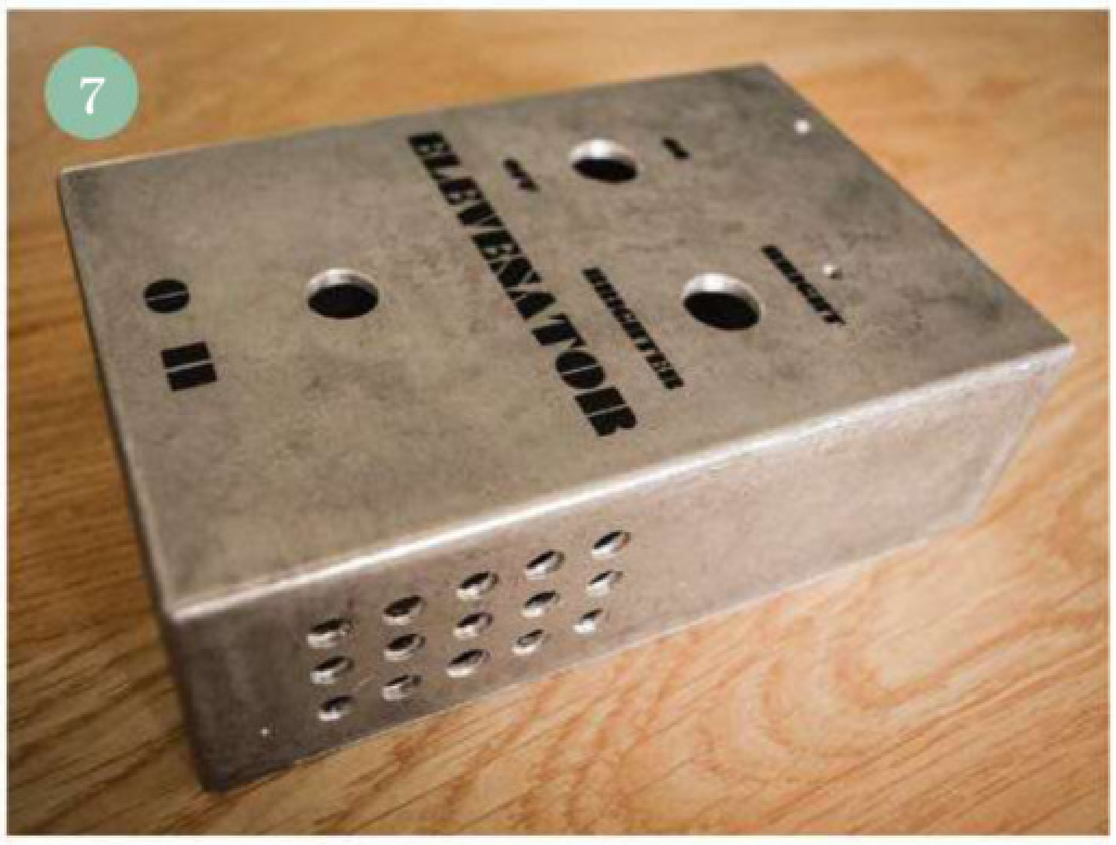
There are myriad ways of attenuating an amplifier signal, but the vast majority of DIY attenuators are based on a straightforward circuit called an L-Pad. This method employs extra resistors to dissipate electrical energy as heat.

In simple terms, amplifiers and speakers must be matched, so if your amp's output is labelled 8 ohms, it should be connected to a speaker rated at 8 ohms. The clever thing about the L-Pad design is the way it adds resistors to the circuit but retains the same 'load' at all times. Let's look at a basic example; if you wire two 8-ohm resistors in parallel, the combined resistance will total 4 ohms. If you solder an 8-ohm resistor across the terminals of an 8-ohm speaker, the result is the same – a 4-ohm load. If you then connect a 4-ohm resistor in series with the paralleled 8-ohm resistor and 8-ohm speaker, the load resistance comes back up to 8 ohms.

The power from the amplifier is divided between the speaker and the resistors. The resistors convert power into heat while the speaker converts the power into sound energy. Since the speaker receives less power from the amp than it did without the added resistors, acoustic energy is lower and the amp sounds quieter **2**.

In the example given above, there would be an attenuation of around

5



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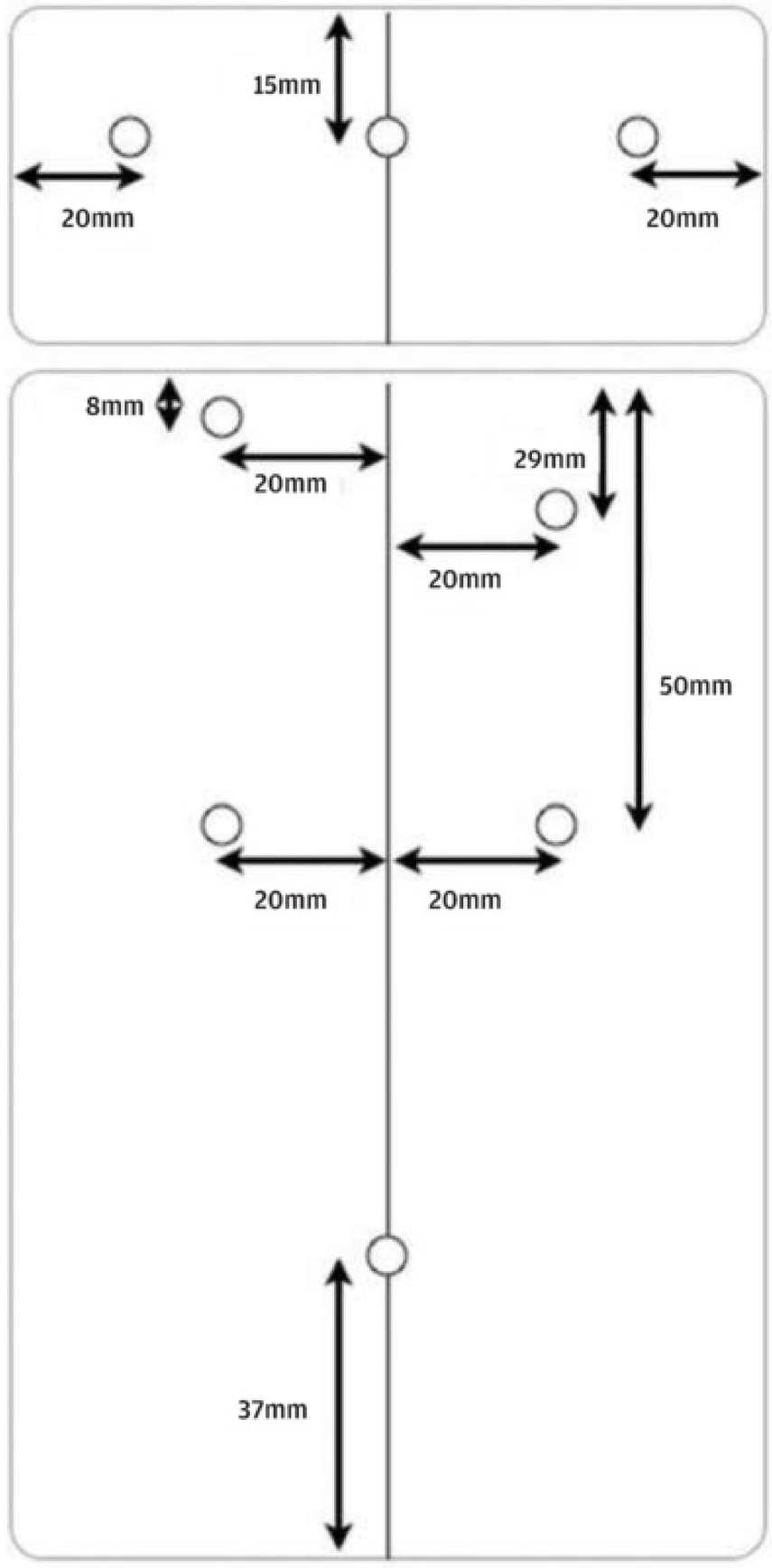

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6dB. Working out the attenuation involves some complex maths, but there are several websites with tables and L-Pad calculators that can make things simple. Checking one of these tables, we see that, roughly speaking, a 20k parallel resistor coupled with a 2k series resistor attenuates the signal by 3dB. With 4k and 5k in the same configuration, the attenuation is closer to 9dB, but the amplifier always 'sees' 8 ohms.

It's perfectly possible to combine a rotary switch with an array of resistors to build an attenuator that works in 3dB increments. In fact, plenty of commercially manufactured attenuators work exactly like that. The common complaint is that the crude settings are generally a bit too quiet or a bit too loud and never quite 'right'.

The easy solution is to use a rotary L-Pad controller. Everyone at *G&B* was massively impressed with the master control on the recently reviewed Elektra 185 amp – and that turned out to be an L-Pad. These devices are like oversized volume pots with dual wire-wound resistors inside 3.

Internal variable resistors are wired in series and parallel and, regardless of the position of the control knob, the total resistance of the L-Pad device remains constant. When choosing an L-Pad there are certain stipulations you should consider. Firstly, you must buy one that matches the load you need. So if you are using an 8-ohm speaker, you will need an 8-ohm L-Pad. Secondly, they have power ratings, so there's no point buying a 15-watt L-Pad to use with a 50-watt amp.

In fact, there's not much point at all in buying a 15-watt L-Pad. You'll save a couple of pounds but the attenuator will always run hot and you may end up blowing it. For this project, I just bit the bullet and sourced a 100-watt, 8-ohm L-Pad . Having said that, I'd still be cautious about using it with amps more powerful than 50 watts.

Bypass switching

The merits of true bypass are well worth a debate if we're referring to pedals, but when you're considering 50cm or so of cable length to connect an amp to a speaker, it's a no-brainer. So our attenuator will have a true bypass toggle switch. This allows the attenuator to be switched completely out of circuit, so you could install one permanently on the inside of a combo cabinet and switch it on only when required. You'll also be able to compare the attenuated and non-attenuated tones.

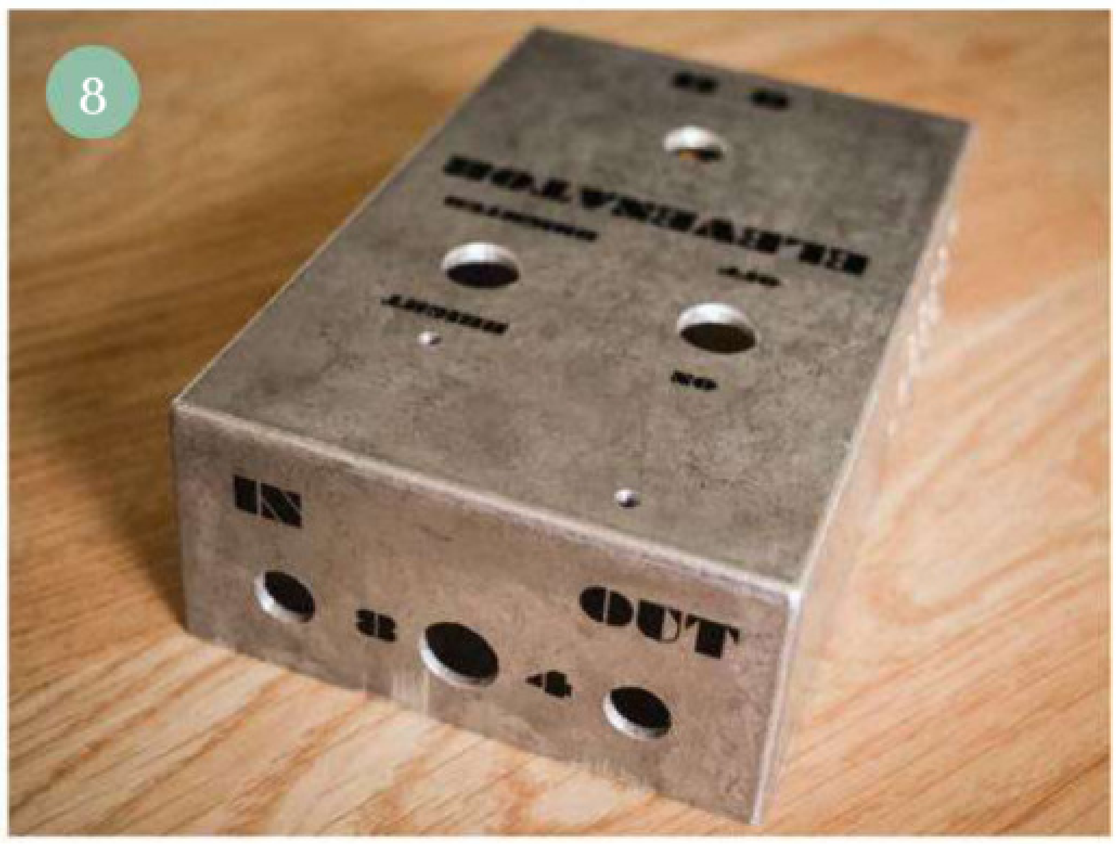
Treble switching

It's those pesky Fletcher Munson curves again! Our perceptions of brightness and bassiness change depending on volume level. So changes in tone that we may perceive when the amp >

5 **We bought heavy-duty switches – partly because they look good, but also because we wanted something robust that could handle the power**

6 **If you use the same enclosure as us, these dimensions should work. Drill pilot holes in the specified locations and increase the diameter using a step cutter to make the components fit**

7 **We made a water slide decal to mark out the controls, and there are plenty of online videos that can show you how. Alternatively, you could just write on the enclosure with permanent marker**



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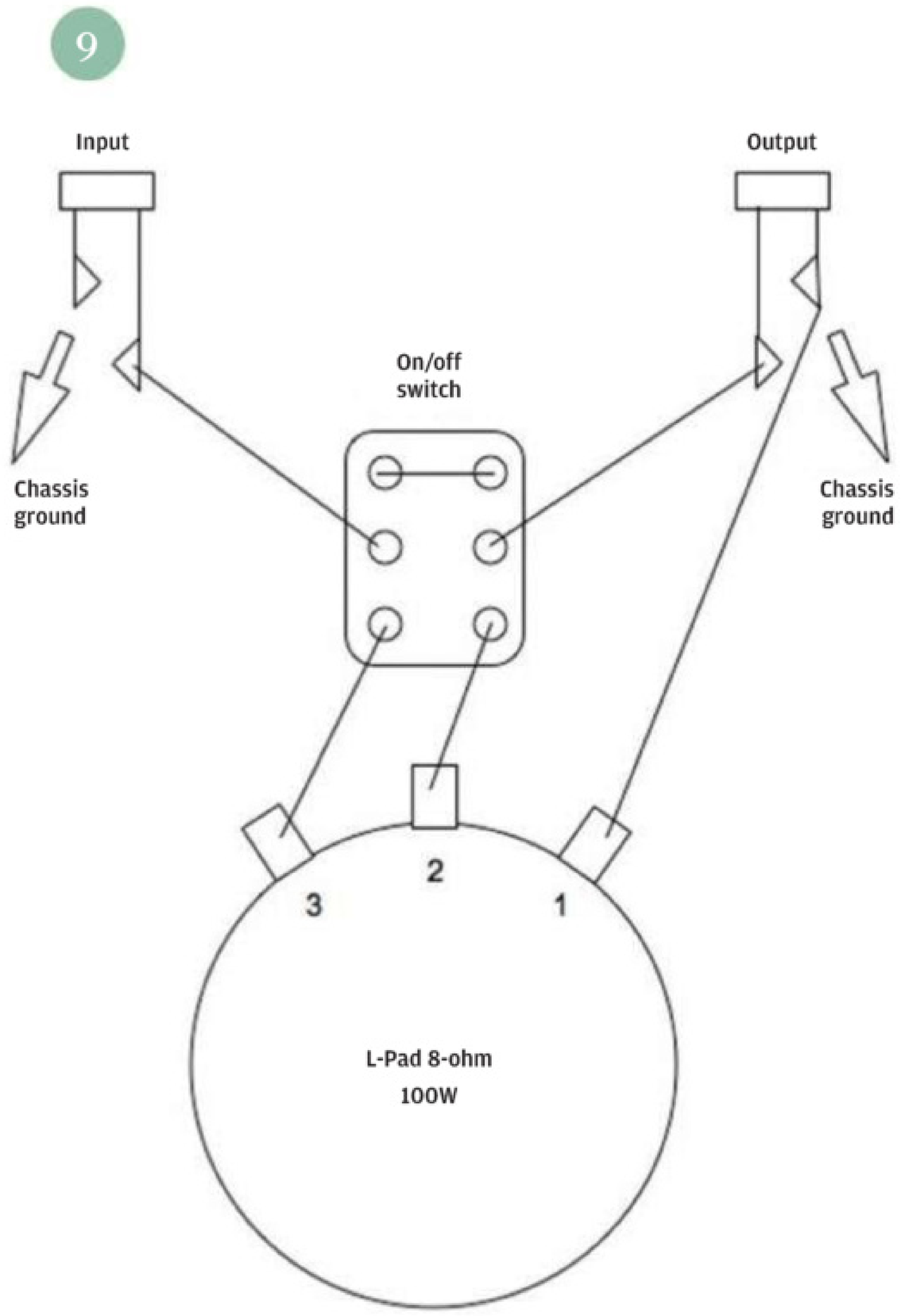


9

8 We made a smaller decal for the side of the enclosure. You wouldn't want to mix up the connections

9 Here's a diagram of the basic attenuator circuit with a bypass switch

10 If you prise back the four tags on the L-Pad cover, the cover can be removed and the L-Pad will run a bit cooler

signal is attenuated may not be a characteristic of the attenuator but rather a function of volume and the way human hearing works.

Either way, one of the complaints levelled at L-Pad attenuators is the way they reduce treble content, with a knock-on effect on clarity as attenuation is increased. Therefore, this design incorporates a three-way treble switch. Using an on/off/on switch means the centre position can be neutral and the other two positions can provide two preset degrees of treble lift.

The basic principle is more or less identical to the treble bleed capacitors used in guitar wiring. The switch connects bipolar electrolytic capacitors across two terminals of the L-Pad, so the upper-frequency content of the amp signal goes straight to the speaker and the attenuator acts only on frequencies below a selected point.

Since the L-Pad and speaker present the amp with a consistent 8-ohm load, regardless of the amount of attenuation, it's quite easy to change that to 4 ohms. All that's needed is an 8-ohm resistor in parallel with the L-Pad.

However, you can't use any old 8-ohm resistor. The type you need has to be able to handle the power produced by the amp. Wire-wound are the type to get, and they come installed inside an aluminium housing. These resistors will ideally be fixed to a heat sink and, in this case, the die-cast aluminium enclosure will serve that purpose adequately 4.

Sourcing the parts

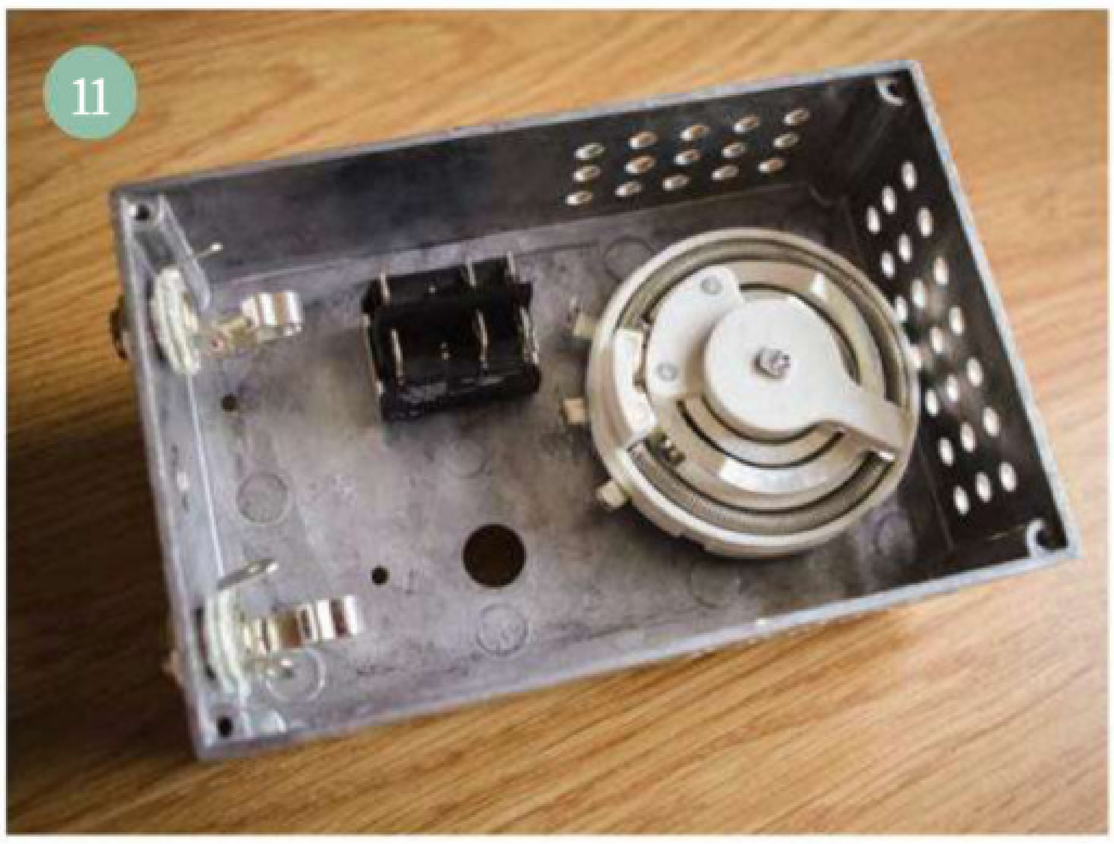
One of the perennial problems with electronics projects is finding the parts you need – or rather finding all the parts you need from a single supplier. When you are obliged to buy from several suppliers, you may end up paying postage charges for each order, and the costs can mount up. With the exception of the power resistors and bipolar capacitors, I was able to get everything I needed from CPC UK. See the parts list for further details.

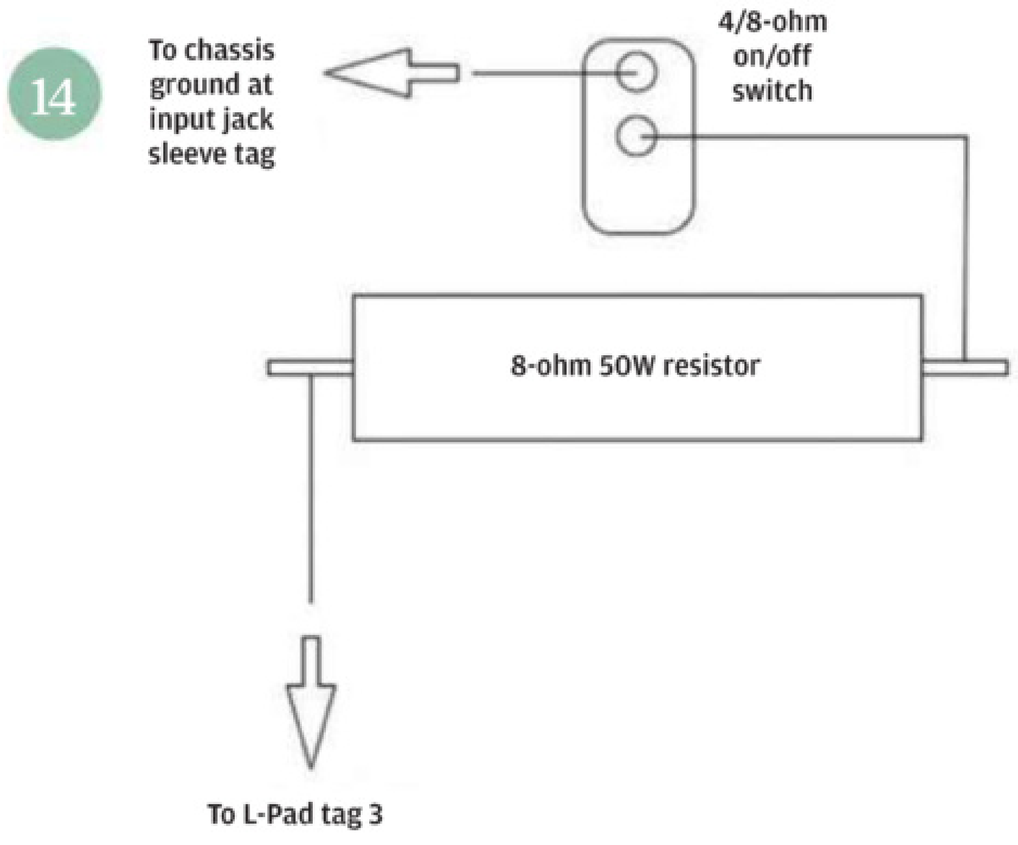
Prepping the enclosure

This turned out to be the trickiest and most time-consuming part of the project, but if you buy an enclosure of the same size and use the measurements provided, the work should progress fairly quickly. I used a Hammond 1075 8PSLA enclosure measuring 49x145x95mm, so it's far larger than a conventional stompbox 6.

Although relatively few holes are required for the components, I drilled ventilation holes in the sides of the enclosure around the position of the L-Pad. Remember how the L-Pad dissipates amp power as heat? The ventilation holes should help to prevent things getting too hot.

Apply masking tape all over the enclosure, mark out the positions





of the holes and drill them out using a small bit – about 3mm in diameter should be fine. These pilot holes can then be widened using a step cutter. Once it's complete, you can remove the masking tape and use needle files to clean off any aluminium burr.

I knocked up a design in a graphics program and printed it onto water slide decal paper. The decal was applied to the box and, once it had dried, I sprayed it with clear coats to seal and protect it 7 & 8.

Assembly, stage 1: the attenuator

Although I've added impedance and treble response switches to this design, you can pick and choose which features will be useful to you. The only compulsory parts are the jack sockets and the L-Pad. With that in mind, I'll build this project in stages, starting with a basic bypassable 8-ohm attenuator 9.

The L-Pad used here has a metal cover. These covers can be removed to expose the insides to the air and keep the L-Pad cool when dealing with high-power amps 10. Start by fixing the jack sockets, L-Pad and bypass switch 11. If you have used a water slide decal, take care not to over-tighten the nuts, because you may tear up the surface.

With the first stage of the wiring now complete, you should test that the L-Pad is working properly. Ensure the unit is switched to bypass, connect the amp's output to the attenuator's input and connect the speaker to the attenuator's output. Switch the amp on and once you've established everything is operating normally, set the attenuator control halfway and switch on the attenuator.

If everything has been done correctly, you should hear the same sound – only quieter. If you can't hear any amp signal, switch back to bypass immediately, turn off the amp and check your wiring. Assuming that everything is working, it's time to move on to the next stage.

Assembly, stage 2: impedance switching

To shoehorn everything into this enclosure, the high-power 8-ohm resistor had to be tucked into the space under the jack sockets. Again, keeping the component cool is paramount, so a bead of thermal compound was run along the underside of the resistor housing before it was fixed to the enclosure with pop rivets 13. Since the enclosure is being used as a heat sink, this compound ensures heat is transferred from the resistor to the enclosure more efficiently.

Two wires were soldered to the resistor, with one connected to the L-Pad and the other to the impedance switch. The second lug of the switch was soldered to the ground on the output jack's sleeve

11 Start by fixing the components onto the enclosure. Note that the L-Pad cover has been removed, so be careful not to drop bits of solder into the L-Pad when you're hooking up the wires

12 After connecting six wires, it's time for testing. If you don't want treble switching or a 4-ohm input, you can stop here because the project is complete

13 To prevent the 8.2-ohm resistor overheating, it is fixed to the enclosure with pop rivets or nuts and bolts. To maximise heat transfer, thermal compound is applied to the underside of the resistor before it's fixed in place

14 Wiring up the impedance switch is very straightforward. You may want to consider soldering hookup wires to the resistor before it is installed in the enclosure

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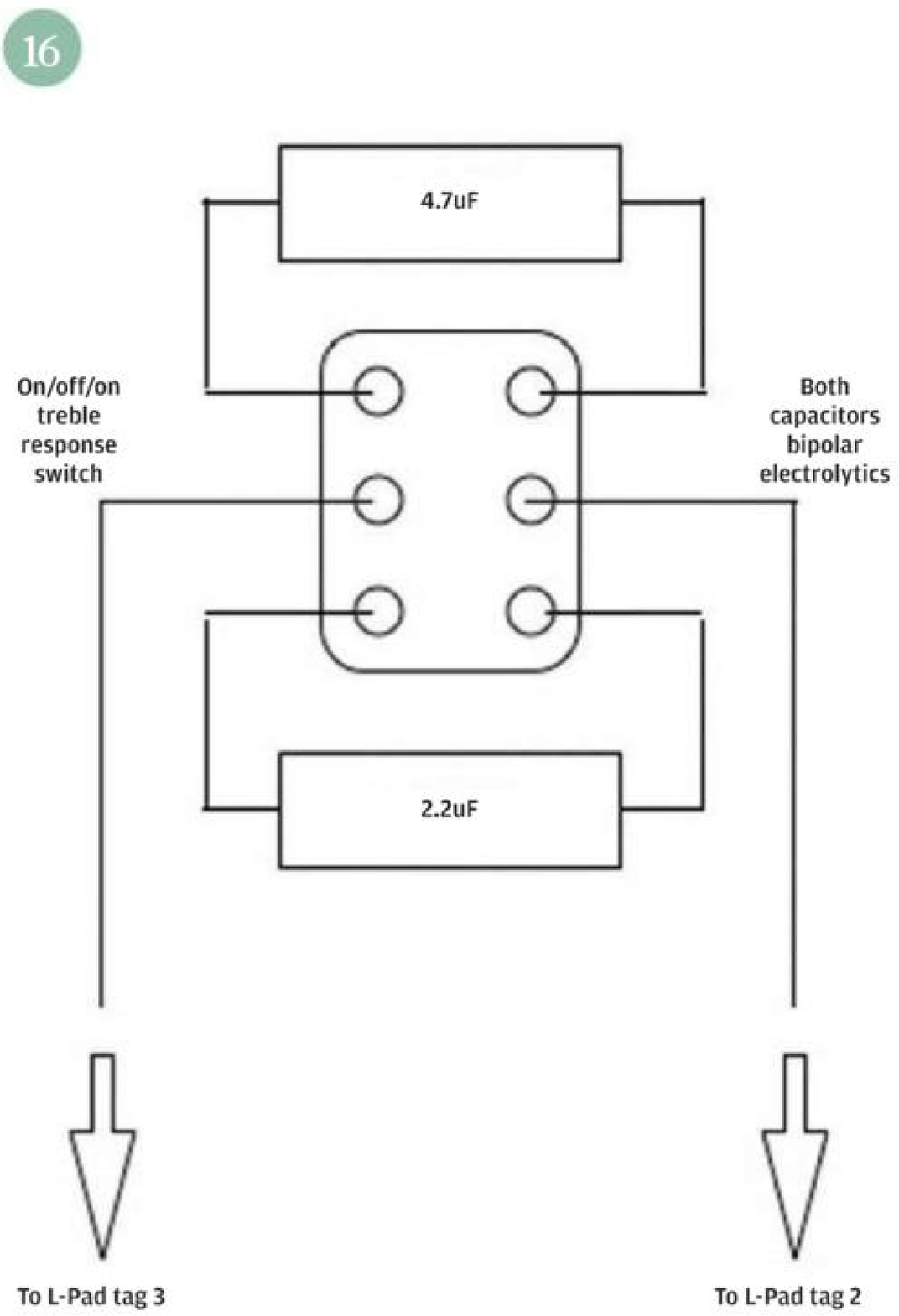

15 The impedance switch is installed and hooked up. Notice how the thermal compound has squeezed out. Too much is better than too little

16 The capacitors and hookup wires can be soldered onto the treble switch prior to installation then soldered onto the L-Pad

17 The treble switch assembly has been installed and connected. We went with 2.2uF and 4.7uF non-polarised electrolytic capacitors. Feel free to experiment with the values to achieve the tone you like

tag 14 & 15. When the switch connects the resistor to ground, it operates in parallel with the L-Pad and the attenuator's impedance drops to 4 ohms.

Assembly, stage 3: treble switch

For the treble switch, it's easiest to solder the capacitors and hookup wires onto the tags before the switch is installed in the enclosure. Various sources suggested values of 4.7uF and 10uF, but I found the 10uF capacitor too bright. You may feel differently, but the values I settled on were 2.2uF and 4.7uF. The effect is more subtle and in keeping with frequency response correction rather than equalisation 16 & 17.

Verdict

Drilling the ventilation holes was the toughest part of this project, but only because it was so tedious. Other than that, it was a quick, easy and cheap project that performs exactly as expected.

Even with the level control set for minimum attenuation, switching the attenuator on results in a slight drop in volume, but that's what it's supposed to do. From there, the level dials down smoothly until it vanishes altogether. After an hour of continuous playing with a 20-watt amp, the L-Pad was barely warm to the touch.

Overdrive can sound a bit grainy without the smoothing effect of a compressed speaker, and you may notice a slight reduction in treble and bass, but throughout most of its range this design sounds surprisingly natural. The attenuated amp tone is certainly preferable to that obtained from using an overdrive or a digital modeller.

So you really should consider building one of these. You owe it to your flat-mates, family, pets, neighbours and to your own sense of hearing.

DISCLAIMER: Running an amplifier flat out for extended periods can cause output transformers to fail and hasten the demise of valves. Anthem Publishing Ltd accepts no responsibility for damage suffered as a consequence of using our attenuator design and all Workshop tutorials are followed at your own risk.

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

CPC UK – cpc.farnell.com
- **L-Pad 8-ohm 100W – order code LS00547**
- **On/Off/On DPDT switch - order code SW04204**
- **On/On DPDT switch – order code SW04202**
- **On/Off Spot switch – order code SW05066**
- **2 x open frame mono jack sockets – order code AV09109**
- **Hammond 10758PSLA enclosure – order code EN81988**

Cricklewood Electronics – cricklewoodelectronics.com
- **2.2uF Alcap bipolar electrolytic capacitor - item number: CAB2U2**
- **4.7uF Alcap bipolar electrolytic capacitor - item number: CAB4U7**

RS Components – uk.rs-online.com
- **8.2R 50 Watt axial panel mount resistor - RS Stock No.107-4147**

Maplin – maplin.co.uk
- **Servisol heat transfer compound – code: N30EE**

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Gretsch Players Edition & Vintage Select Edition guitars

It ain't nuthin' but a G twang as **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** checks out a couple of contrasting new takes on old classics from Gretsch

Winter NAMM 2016 saw Gretsch unveil a stack of new models and restructure its Japanese-made Professional Collection into two distinct strands: the Players Edition and the Vintage Select Edition. Broadly speaking, the Vintage Select models are reissues of classic Gretsch guitars from specific years of manufacture, while the Players Edition instruments are designed to be a little more robust and road-worthy.

Gretsch product manager Adam Bowden-Smith explains: "The Vintage Select guitars are period-correct editions of our most famous models from what many consider to be the golden age of Gretsch guitars, so we have models from 1955, '59, '62, etc. All years that had a defining effect on the model and the brand as a whole. Having said that, there are some concessions to the modern player: 'invisible' upgrades, if you will, that don't spoil the vintage look, such as pinned bridges and treble bleed on the master volume.

"The Players Edition guitars are the modern Gretsch for the modern player. While retaining 'That Great Gretsch Sound' and looks, they have many upgrades that mean your Gretsch can be your main guitar, as we say, 'every song, every night'.

"Improving gigability was our main aim. The String-Thru Bigsby, for example, transforms a Bigsby-equipped guitar from a string-changing headache to a joy! Meanwhile, the locking tuners, Tusq XL nut and pinned Rocking Bar bridge work in cahoots to maximise tuning stability and tone. The bodies are slightly thinner too, for comfort. Most 50s-style Gretsches are 2.75 inches deep, the Players Edition are 2.25 inches. It doesn't sound like much, but that half inch makes all the difference!"

Representing the Players Edition here is the marvelously ostentatious G6136T-BLK Players Edition Falcon. In the vintage reissue corner is the G6122T-62 Vintage Select Edition '62 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman: a dead ringer for the guitar that George Harrison played when 73 million Americans tuned in to watch The Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show on 9 February 1964.

The workers in the Terada factory aren't just making 'em like they used to in Brooklyn – they're making them better

In 2016, when it comes to fit and finish, the workers in the Terada factory in Japan aren't simply making 'em like they used to in Brooklyn – they're making them better and with a much higher degree of consistency. Although there's something special about a good old Gretsch, we've encountered some rather wonky vintage examples too; there's none of that here: the standard of construction is excellent throughout.

All that said, under hot lights in front of a baying crowd, a traditionally-constructed Gretsch can still behave more like a bucking bronco than a trusty steed. The Brylcreem'd masses have devised their own DIY solutions over the years, but 2013 saw Gretsch release a range of Center Block models designed to be considerably more stable and high-volume and gain-friendly than its hollowbody models and cast the net wider than the brand's heartland rockabilly demographic.

We're big fans of the G6137TCB Center Block Panther (currently £2,599) to the extent that it's been this writer's main gigging and recording guitar – usurping a long-suffering ES-335 – for a couple of years now. Even though Chet Atkins was among those calling for the company to introduce centre-blocks as bands got louder in the late 1950s, there are still plenty of Gretsch fans who consider the lively response and depth of hollowbody construction absolutely essential to the Gretsch archtop experience.

Of course, neither the Players Edition Falcon nor the Vintage Select Edition Country Gentleman are completely >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The entry point to Gretsch's new 'workingman' Players Edition range comes courtesy of the **G6118T Anniversary** and **G6119T Tennessee Rose** models (both **£1,899**). The **Gretsch G6137TCB Center Block Panther £2,599** shares the Country Gentleman's classic double-cutaway outline but has upper-fret access and feedback resistance more akin to a **Gibson ES-335**. **Guild**'s **Starfire** models (from **£614**) have serious heritage, and offer great value for money and wonderfully airy, vintage-style tones. Elsewhere, the **Gibson Memphis 1959 ES-330 £2,949** is a real thriller that covers an awful lot of ground, from Grant Green to the Brit beat boom and beyond.

hollow inside: the Falcon features ML bracing (designed by Fender/Gretsch guru Mike Lewis and Masao Terada of the Terada company, this is similar to trestle bracing except the back and the top have two points of contact rather than four, retaining contact beneath the bridge but dispensing with the posts near the neck join), while the Country Gentleman has vintage-style parallel tone bars that run lengthways beneath the top.

In use

As the owner of a modern Gretsch, who replaced the stock tune-o-matic with a Rocking Bar bridge, this writer can attest to the fact that, when pinned and properly maintained, there are no significant tuning or intonation woes to be had from this design. In addition, the low E string stays put in its channel even when hit very hard – something that can be a problem when the distance between bridge and tailpiece creates a shallow break angle over the bridge. Throw in the drilled anchor bar on the Falcon's String-Thru Bigsby and string changes are a breeze, too.

Both necks are slim and comfortable, but although the Vintage Select Country Gentleman incorporates some stealthy pragmatism, it's worth noting that its large heel and small vintage-style frets make it a less than easy ride in positions above the 15th fret. The additional access afforded by the double cutaway is negated somewhat by the heel joining the body at the 14th fret; perhaps counterintuitively given its single cutaway and longer scale length, high-register bluesy bends are easier to execute on the Falcon, though its slightly larger fretwire helps.

Compared to our own Center Block Panther (loaded with the same High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups), the Falcon has a considerably bigger plugged-in voice in the neck position, with huge depth for honeyed jazz chords, but still plenty of top-end bite when you pick hard at the bridge during solos. The Panther's bridge pickup snarls louder with more punch, but that's where the centre-block helps to give it an extra push.

Voices in some corners of the internet will tell you to ditch stock High Sensitive Filter'Tron pickups in favour of TV Jones alternatives, but we would advise against acting in haste. The Japanese units sound very good indeed; they are a little more brash and strident (and certainly higher output) than the TV Jones Classics on the Country Gentleman, but some players may prefer this and we can state from experience that they work brilliantly in a live band context. The Country Gent's pickups are a little softer, smoother and sweeter, but the Japanese Filter'Trons can certainly do sweet too, just as the TVs can do brash twang with the right amp tone! When it comes to pickups, it's a case of following your ears, not the crowd.

Predictably, the Country Gent's lack of f-holes and thinline body make it more resistant to feedback than the Falcon, which really does bloom easily into a midrange-y howl. If you get the gain and volume balance right you can control it and make it musical, but we suspect that this isn't the guitar for playing small pub stages in close proximity to loud amplifiers if you use any kind of drive.

Though most Gretsch demos on YouTube default to *Mystery Train*-style rockabilly or something similar, there's so much more to both of these guitars. While we'd still head straight to the Center-Block series for a Gretsch that does balls-to-the wall rock, in a contemporary context a Gretsch such as either of these models is a wonderful paintbrush for creating expansive soundscapes in conjunction with washes of delay and reverb.

You get a lot more clarity, harmonic complexity and treble out of a Filter'Tron or TV Classic than most other humbuckers for a start, but in all positions it's a kind of soft, sweet treble that doesn't sound thin or harsh. The treble bleed on the master volume of both instruments works as advertised, with a noticeably brighter tone when you roll back the level than with the individual pickup volume controls.

The Country Gent's period-correct features such as the mute and standby switch are useful too; the latter makes a half-decent killswitch, while the former's ability to deaden the sustain of just three strings at a time (either the low or high set) and keep them in tune while the others ring allows you to create some really interesting sounds, particularly with raked arpeggios and stabbed chords into cavernous ambience.

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G6136T-BLK Players Edition Falcon

- **PRICE** £2,799
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody six-string electric guitar, manufactured in Japan
- **BUILD** Laminated maple top, back and sides with ML bracing, maple neck with 12-inch (305mm) radius ebony fingerboard, pearloid thumbnail inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets, Graph Tech Tusq XL nut
- **HARDWARE** Gold Grover Imperial tuners, pinned Rocking Bar bridge, String-Thru Bigsby B6GP vibrato tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** 2x High Sensitive Filter'Tron humbucking pickups, master volume with treble bleed, no load master tone control, individual pickup volume controls, three-position pickup selector switch, Squeezebox paper-in-oil capacitors
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.5lbs/3.4kg
- **FINISHES** Black gloss urethane (as reviewed) or White (G6136T-WHT)
- **CONTACT** Fender GBI 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Bigsby string changes are no longer awkward thanks to the String-Thru tailpiece
+ High Sensitive Filter'Trons sound excellent
+ Stunning looks and excellent build quality

- Difficult to control in close proximity to a loud amp

What's even cooler than a White Falcon? A black version that's pre-modded for the road

8/10

KEY FEATURES

G6122T-62 Vintage Select Edition '62 Chet Atkins Country Gentleman

- **PRICE** £2,599
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody six-string electric guitar, manufactured in Japan
- **BUILD** Laminated maple top, back and sides with parallel tone bar bracing and simulated f-holes, maple neck with 12-inch (305mm) radius ebony fingerboard, pearloid thumbnail inlays, 22 vintage-style frets, zero fret, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Gold Grover Imperial tuners, pinned Rocking Bar bridge, Bigsby B6G vibrato tailpiece, dual foam string mutes
- **ELECTRICS** 2x TV Jones Classic humbucking pickups, master volume with treble bleed, three-position tone switch, three-position pickup selector switch, individual pickup volume controls, standby switch, Squeezebox paper-in-oil capacitors
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.6"/625mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 19mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8lbs/3.6kg
- **FINISHES** Walnut stain gloss urethane (as reviewed) only

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Pinned bridge contributes to excellent general stability
+ Easier to use at high volume than the Falcon
+ TV Jones pickups have mellow, vintage tones in spades

- Upper-fret access limited

For authentic sixties jangle and fifties twang, there are few more evocative choices, and this is almost certainly the best Country Gentleman that Gretsch has ever made

9/10

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DANELECTRO '59M SPRUCE & '64 £579 & £999

ELECTRIC GUITARS

Danelectro '59M Spruce & '64

Danelectro guitars offer cool, quirky tones and retro looks at reasonable prices. **MARCUS LEADLEY** tests a pair of new models

As well as its legacy as a classic guitar brand of the 1950s and 60s, Danelectro's contemporary incarnation has amassed its own very interesting history. There was a time in the early 2000s when it seemed as if not a week went by without a budget Dano release. And when the roster became too unwieldy, the company pulled the plug on guitar making (with the exception of the classic '59 Double Cut) and concentrated on its pedal catalogue. Some years on, we have a respectably varied, nicely contained selection of instruments. These two new models push the price point a little and introduce some extra options at the higher end of production.

'59M Spruce

The classic Dano body is still constructed using Masonite (a type of hardboard) over a pine frame; it's part of the Dano magic, and it remains the form for the standard double cutaway. This new '59, however, has a spruce top and rims and – unlike most previous '59s – the body cavity is vented with a single f-hole; it's actually more of a Rickenbacker-style slash. It looks stunning in Vintage White with a blue scratchplate. In other respects, the '59M retains all the elements that make it a '59. The company abandoned the single-piece wooden bridge saddle for this model in favour of an intonatable metal bridge long ago, and the Spruce features a chunky and reliable wraparound unit. This is, however, recessed into the top to give better control over string-height adjustment. The bolt-on neck itself is a peach: the slim C profile fits nicely in the hand.

Unlike other '59s, this model has a spruce top and rims and the body cavity is vented with a single f-hole

The 21-fret rosewood fingerboard feels fast and smooth. Its edges are nicely finished, with no exposed fret tangs or finishing issues. I've never been 100 per cent convinced by Danelectro's use of aluminium nuts – it's part of the heritage and part of the reason why the instruments sound so open and bell-like. However, they need to be very well maintained and potentially lubricated to avoid string creep and tuning issues. While the electrics are simple enough, there's an inevitable Dano twist: the cylindrical Lipstick pickups (so called because of the metal tubes that were used initially in the manufacture) are spring mounted and height adjustable from the back of the guitar. They're wired in series (unlike most electric guitars), so instead of hum-defeating phase cancellation with both pickups >

The '59M Spruce features individual stacked volume and tone controls

LIKE THIS, TRY THESE...

DANELECTRO '59M Spruce

If you fancy the time-tested original DC, the standard **Danelectro '59 Double Cut** can be yours for **£499**. While luthier Jerry Jones retired in 2011, you might be lucky enough to pick up a **JJ Original Shorthorn $1,200**. If it's the signature sound of the Lipstick pickups you fancy, **Seymour Duncan** has Strat replacement versions for around **£50**.

LIKE THIS, TRY THESE...

DANELECTRO '64

Mosrite fans can still own a branded original, with prices starting around $3,000. For players with the lust but not the budget, there's an **Eastwood Sidejack DLX** offering single coils, Mosrite styling and a Jazzmaster-style tremolo tailpiece for a very reasonable **£379**. Back up the cost ladder, you'll find several versions by **Hallmark**. The **60 Custom** in 3-Tone Sunburst looks particularly cool, but there are loads of colours to choose from, all at around **$999**.

on we get a higher-output sound that's very full and rounded. As well as a three-way selector switch, we also get dual tone and volume controls – these are stacked rather than separate, and this seems to work well in practice.

In use

Wow! The construction really makes a difference. Traditionally, the closed-chambered construction of a '59 gives a controlled acoustic tone with a strong emphasis to the upper-midrange. This instrument immediately sounds more open, with a very even frequency response. There's a charming, piano-like clarity that's very appealing. The sound is more rounded than, say, a chambered Telecaster but less acoustic than a centre-blocked ES-335. A surprising amount of sound is projected from the f-hole itself, so the guitar is louder acoustically than the standard Double Cut. All of this translates well into the electric character. The single-coil pickups are adequately microphonic to pick up all the tonal nuances and playing inflections the instrument can deliver. The Spruce will certainly feed back if you want it to, but not in an uncontrollable way.

The bridge pickup delivers biting lead tones and plenty of 60s-style jangle. You might find yourself wanting to tame its surgical brightness at times – this is easy to do at the amp end of things – however, the onboard tone controls are a bit 'all or nothing'. Experimenting with capacitors post-purchase is neither difficult nor expensive. The neck pickup is much more mellow; together, the pickups represent possibly the best-kept Dano secret: a big, wide-spectrum voice. It's great for simply strumming chords and, while it loves to be driven hard, my preference is for an amp running around its break-up point. Sauce things up with some delay and reverb and forget about the rain outside!

'64

The '64 created quite a stir at this year's NAMM show; while Danelectro's Hodad, which came out in '99, had a clearly Mosrite-inspired shape, this '64 is nothing short of a loving homage to the Ventures model and the two-piece solid body boasts the distinctive German carve. It's not a slavish copy, though; the presence of a dual humbucking Lipstick at the bridge with a coil split to enable humbucking/single-coil operation is pure Hodad. There is, however, a traditional-looking single coil in the neck position and – Mosrite-style – it's angled for a more even response.

The neck is bolted on using a peanut-shaped metal plate. Technically, it's a 22-fret instrument, but that includes the zero fret. This is a feature common to many guitars from the 50s and 60s, Mosrites included. The nut serves simply as a string guide and the strings intone over the zero fret, where they contact directly. This can precipitate a particular slinky action. Not everyone likes zero frets (for a particular generation, the memory of busted and badly set-up English and European guitars is hard to dispel), and for the most part they've dropped out of common usage. Personally, I love the feel of a neck with a zero fret, and if you've never tried one I recommend it.

The '64 features a licensed Bigsby vibrato; a suitably classic touch but not quite the same beast as the Mosrite Vibramute. The Bigsby is an ideal alternative and, if treated respectfully, will deliver vintage-style bends while the guitar remains in tune. The tune-o-matic bridge's roller saddles help this a great deal.

In use

While the Hodad pays more lip service to the Danelectro tradition, the '64 riffs on a different theme. That's not to say it doesn't feel and sound great – it does. However, it doesn't feel especially like a Danelectro. Realistically, the bridge pickup is the only signature Dano feature. Using the coil split means that the bridge pickup can deliver a huge range of different voices – and the single-coil tone is the most definitively Danelectro. You can switch very effectively between single-coil and humbucking modes for rhythm and lead parts, too. However, there is an ergonomic issue; unless you use an angled jack plug, the bar of the Bigsby rests over the tone knob, making it hard to engage the coil split.

Played clean, the humbucking mode has something of a midrange hump that feels a little boxy. However, this translates into exceptional lead tones when driven hard because these forward mids are where you find singing tones and a lot of the pick-edge articulation. The neck single coil has a character all of its own: very open and more toppy than a P-90, but not exactly Strat-ish either. It's warm, but chimes nicely and is great for pop, country and jazz. It's better at bluesy midrange break-up than it is at high-gain hard rock, but that's to be expected; you can combine it with both bridge pickup settings, so there's bags of flexibility and some signature sounds to be had.

KEY FEATURES
DANELECTRO '59M Spruce

- **PRICE** £579 (no case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Electric guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Spruce top and rims, Masonite back, bolt-on maple neck with 21-fret rosewood fingerboard; aluminium nut
- **HARDWARE** Danelectro adjustable bridge, individual, vintage-style machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Lipstick single-coil pickups, individual stacked tone and volume controls, 3-way pickup selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25"/635mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.3mm at nut, 53.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.2mm at first fret, 22.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 5lbs/2.27kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Dark Aqua, Vintage White, Indigo, Orange Metallic, 3-Tone Sunburst and Red Metallic
- **CONTACT** John Hornby Skewes Ltd 01132 865 381

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Great for both vintage jangle and modern clean tones
+ Excellent for electric blues, bottleneck and garage rock sounds
+ Lovely neck

- Tone controls need attention
- Aluminium nuts can be problematic

A clever twist that adds new potential to the classic Dano Double Cut theme. The guitar retains the classic DC sound and feel while adding some tonal nuance

8/10

KEY FEATURES
DANELECTRO '64

- **PRICE** £999 (no case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Electric guitar, made in Korea
- **BUILD** Solid 2-piece body, bolt-on maple neck with 22-fret (inc zero fret) rosewood fingerboard; aluminium nut
- **HARDWARE** Licenced Bigsby vibrato tailpiece with roller saddle tune-o-matic-style bridge, vintage-style individual machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** Dual humbucking Lipstick pickup (bridge) operating in single coil or humbucker mode, master volume and tone control (with push/pull coil split), Danelectro single coil (neck), 3-way pickup selector
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25"/635mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.5mm at first fret, 22.3mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7lbs/3.17kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Dark Aqua, Vintage White, Indigo, Orange Metallic, 3-Tone Sunburst and Red Metallic

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A cool, if derivative, take on an often overlooked 60s guitar theme
+ Great tonal flexibility
+ Excellent player

- Vintage-style trem – use with care
- Price feels steep, especially without a hardcase

Simply loads of fun! Whether you want clean jangle, punk thrash or wailing lead tones, the '64 will deliver. And yes, you can play Ramones tunes all night long

8/10

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Fender Bassbreaker 007 & 15

"A new breed of sound that words can't describe," says Fender. This might be the shortest review that **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** has ever written...

After a teaser campaign, Fender's Bassbreaker range was officially announced at the end of 2015 and launched at Winter NAMM 2016 in Anaheim. Seven decades have passed since the arrival of Leo Fender's first 'Woody' amps, but a peek at the multiple PCBs and ribbon cables inside the new models here reveals that plenty has changed about the way FMIC makes amps in the interim.

Change is of course central to the story of Fender amplification, but the Bassbreaker range (which also comprises the larger 18/30 and 45 units) playfully imagines a "parallel evolution" in which Fender got dirtier rather than cleaner in the 1960s, and as a result sounded more like the amps from this side of the pond that powered the nascent rock genre using circuits based on those developed by Fender in the fifties.

It's an interesting idea, and the cosmetics also draw on the company's illustrious heritage with an update on the 1948 'block' logo and a dark grey tweed covering that looks really smart in the flesh. The 1x10 007 combo (also available as a head for £210) is a single-channel, master volume affair with a built-in treble booster. The 15 head (also available as a combo for £470) is more complex, with three voices and onboard digital hall reverb. Both use EL84 power valves and Celestion speakers for a more mid-Atlantic accent than a traditional Fender. Time to plug in...

In use

Turning first to the Bassbreaker 15 mini stack, with the master set high and the gain around 10 o'clock in low-gain mode, the clean sound is rather dark but, happily, engaging the bright switch lifts the blanket and shifts the voicing into more neutral territory. It's still a little boomy, but rolling the bass back to 10 o'clock and the mids up to three o'clock, while leaving the treble flat, creates a nice clean 'base' sound with a little bite when you dig in and a sprinkling of EL84 chime for chord work. Add a clean boost into the equation and the amp starts to drive nicely. There's a little background hum but nothing obtrusive.

What a difference a cab makes; wondering why engaging the bright switch seemed essential leads us to try the head through our own compact pine 1x12 loaded with an Eminence Red Fang alnico speaker, and this changes the complexion entirely. Rather than getting the feeling that the amp's natural voice is fighting against a woolly cabinet, now those clean sounds really sing, with sweeter and more complex harmonic content negating the need for the bright switch. Bass is still plentiful and we simply roll back the middle a notch from where we had it set to achieve the desired amount of treble. Pushing up the gain to halfway increases the volume considerably >

Inside the Bassbreaker 15

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Small, affordable valve amps with EL84s aren't exactly scarce. Check out the **Orange OR15H £459**, **Vox AC15C1X** £695, **Laney VC15-110 £359** and Fender's own **Blues Junior £490** for starters. **Blackstar's Artist 15 £649** sees the British company using 6L6 power valves for a range of transatlantic tonal flavours of its own.

The Bassbreaker 15 has three voices, accessible via the structure control

Both amps feature reassuringly chunky knobs with a smooth action

and adds sustain, though we're still in something more like aggressive clean territory than overdrive and there's no real crunch yet. Winding the master down from band to bedroom levels, it's clear that power stage compression is a big part of what we've just heard.

The onboard hall reverb isn't the most sumptuous or organic: after an initial wash of short repeats, the effect tails off abruptly. The wetter the signal is, the more hiss is introduced, too. Given choice, we'd have opted for a digital algorithm modelled after a classic Fender spring reverb, but effects junkies are furnished with an FX loop so they can bring their own ambience.

Winding the gain up full – it's really pushing some air now – and cranking the middle control yields our favourite sound so far: it's cutting and raunchy with elements of sixties Marshall and fifties Fender in the stew. Boogie-rockers on both sides of the pond will get a lot of mileage out of this – it's great for Keef, Joe Perry, Faces or Black Crowes tones, but if you like your rock bands a little more straightahead it moves into latter-day Foo Fighters territory too, especially with the master up high and the power amp working hard.

The Bassbreaker 15 is quite a lot of amplifier already, with perhaps enough range for players who favour drive pedals for lead work. When you flip over to the medium-gain setting on the structure control, this is where your early Foo Fighters and Green Day – not to mention AC/DC and GN'R rhythm – sounds live, again straddling an imaginary line somewhere over the Altantic. This time, despite the EL84 power valves, there are hints of cranked Blackface Bassman and hot Plexi-type tones. The bottom end holds together well for American punk palm muting, and with the gain and master pushed this thing gets pretty damn loud for a 15-watter running into a 1x12. Again, we like it best with the mids pushed nearly all the way up. In this context, it's clear that the BB112 cabinet is far, far happier and seems to be complementing the sound rather than inhibiting it.

And then there's the high-gain mode. Yikes. The biggest, baddest and loudest sound on offer makes you start to question this amp's 15-watt rating, as it's a huge voice with big bass, but the tightness and definition to handle drop D chugging, heavy alt.rock such as Biffy Clyro and even Lamb Of God-style metal riffing. Again, though, it sounds best with the mids pushed. Fender has experimented with high gain before, of course, but this is probably the company's most credible attempt so far (without an EVH badge on it) at the kind of tones that wouldn't be out of place at Download Festival. With the master and gain maxed out in high-gain mode, the attack isn't as fast as it might be with a bigger power stage, but fast, palm-muted parts hold up better at the bottom end than they have any right to – and the cabinet definitely helps.

Switching over to the 007, it's clearly a very different amplifier but shares some common issues with the cleaner end of the 15 in that the cabinet and speaker seem to work against the more vintage side of its personality, though in this case there's a little extra boxiness. Again, we prefer our own pine extension cab with an alnico speaker, and this really helps tease some excellent, almost boutique-style EL84 tones out of this amp. Don't expect clean sounds that compete with a drummer unless your drummer is a six-week old kitten, but there are many other Fender amps for that and nevertheless there's loads of delicious raunch with a chimey high end that rewards digging in and has us rolling out riffs from *Revolver*-era Beatles, The Kinks, more recent power-pop and alt-country.

With the master and mids cranked and gain at 9 o'clock, it's the kind of touch-sensitive experience you either have to push a Vox into the red or go well into four figures in the boutique market to get. There's a little more hum than is ideal, but we're having too much fun digging in to care. Through the combo's own speaker, it loses some high-end complexity; it's a little more lo-fi overall but cool and Kinks-y nonetheless. Kick in the treble boost and you'll want to roll back the mids to 12 o'clock to avoid fizz and eyeball-slicing high-end. With that done, it's a cool voice that's great for incisive *Sgt Pepper*-style fuzzy lead tones and even Neil Young flavours.

The marketing blurb states that this is 'a guitar amp for players who crave traditional Fender cleans and dare to unleash their dirty side.' That doesn't quite ring true, as this isn't the amp for the former but, with the right speaker, it generates some very enjoyable sounds that flirt with classic EL84 (at the lower end of the gain spectrum) and tweed tonality (at the higher end) without the crazy volumes or pricing.

KEY FEATURES

Fender Bassbreaker 007 Combo

- **PRICE** £280
- **DESCRIPTION** 7-watt Class A valve combo, made in Mexico, particle board construction
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7 (preamp), 1x EL84 (power amp), solid-state rectification
- **SPEAKER** 1x 10-inch Celestion Ten 30
- **TOP PANEL** Input, treble boost on/off, gain, bass, middle, treble, master, power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** Speaker output (defeats internal speaker), line out, treble boost footswitch (optional)
- **DIMENSIONS** 402(w)x375(h) x216mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 11.5kg/25.5lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender UK & ROI 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent value for money
+ Delivers hot EL84 tones at sensible volumes
+ Compact size

- Doesn't stay clean beyond bedroom levels and would benefit immensely from a cab/speaker upgrade

A cool, very affordable little combo but for £210 we'd buy the head and run it through a pine cab with an alnico speaker

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender Bassbreaker 15 Head

- **PRICE** £385 (BB 112 birch ply cabinet with 12" Celestion V-Type speaker is £210)
- **DESCRIPTION** 15-watt Class A/B valve head with digital hall reverb, made in Mexico
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7 (preamp), 2x EL84 (power amp), solid-state rectification
- **TOP PANEL** Input, bright on/off, gain, structure, bass, middle, treble, master, reverb, mute on/off (mutes power amp and speaker while XLR line out remains live), power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** 4/8/16-ohm impedance select, 2x parallel speaker outputs, effects send and return, XLR line out with cabinet emulator and ground lift
- **DIMENSIONS** 496(w)x247(h) x223mm(d)
- **WEIGHT** 11.5kg/25.5lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Credible overdrive and high-gain sounds that span several decades of rock
+ Competitive pricing
+ Cabinet works well in a driven context...

- ...but is a little dark and flat for sparkling cleans

If all you want to do is rock, this is a compact rig with a big voice and enough volume for gigs

8/10

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TAYLOR 858E £3,284
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Taylor 858e 12-string

Taylor's new top-of-the-line 12-string has been optimised by master luthier Andy Powers. **HUW PRICE** does the dozen...

Incredible as it may seem, not so long ago Taylor Guitars was still a fairly obscure operation. As a kid, I would buy imported American guitar magazines, and I remember Taylor adverts in black and white featuring the company's flagship 12-string model.

Out of curiosity, I dug one out of the archive, and you could contact Taylor via a PO box in Lemon Grove, California or phone and (presumably) ask to speak with Bob. Although Taylor went on to become the world's biggest acoustic guitar brand, it's surprising how some things remained unchanged.

The headstock and pickguard shapes were fully formed by 1983 and, from what I can make out, Taylor was using abalone to inlay the rosette back then, but the fussy bridge is long gone. The Grand Orchestra shape of this 858e is smoother and less derivative than the hourglass curves of the 80s jumbo.

It's hardly contentious to suggest Taylor guitars have divided opinion. Countless players have appreciated the build quality, easy playability and contemporary styling and tone. However, those with traditional tastes have sometimes found Taylors a bit clinical. There are even those who see Taylors as superb gigging tools, but choose to play different guitars at home and in the studio.

The appointment of master luthier Andy Powers a few years ago seemed to coincide with positive changes at Taylor. On certain models, wood binding replaced the sterile white plastic, nickel plating replaced the chrome and the finishes became softer and less stark.

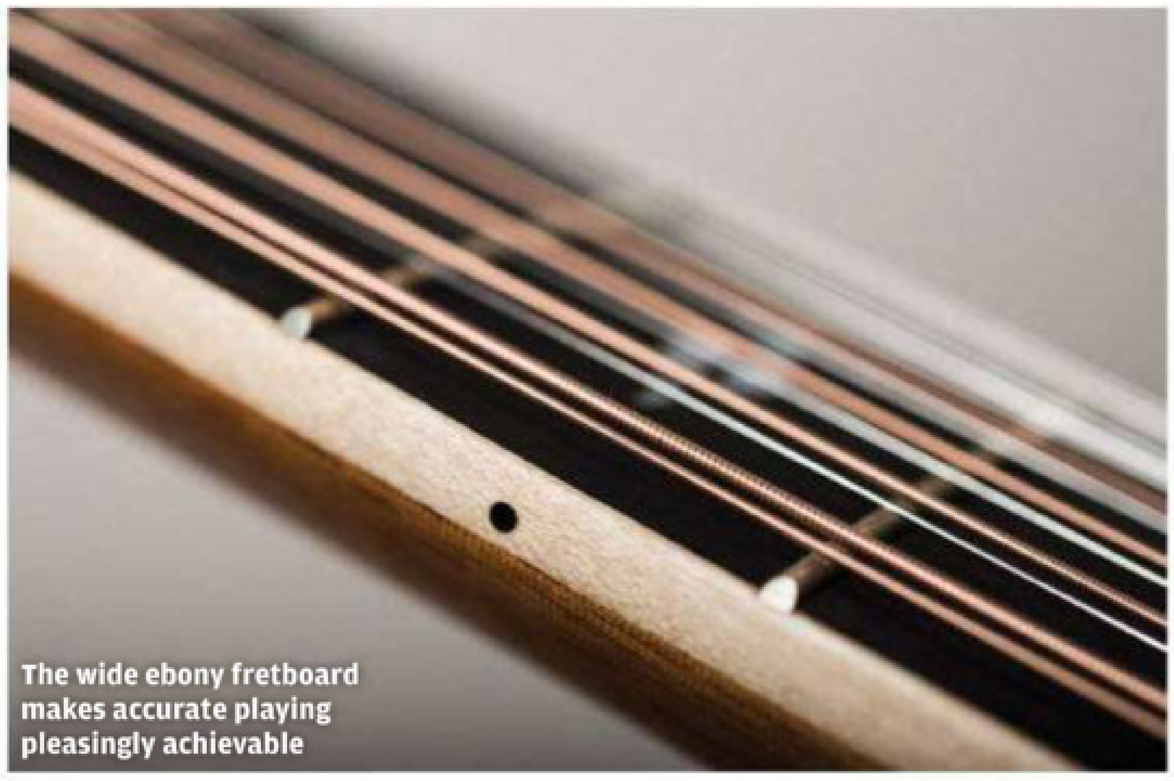
There are undoubtedly too many other little things to list here, but the upshot is that Taylor guitars started to feel more 'human'. The 858e is an example of these newer Taylors that sit there on a stand enticing you to pick it up and start playing.

The solid sitka spruce top is a fantastic-looking piece of tone timber with straight grain and generous cross silking

The solid sitka spruce top is a fantastic-looking piece of tone timber with straight grain, an even colour and generous cross silking. The solid Indian rosewood back and sides have a deep chocolate hue, although the grain is more vivid on the sides than the back. The back itself sounds extremely lively, with a variety of clearly defined tap tones all across its surface.

Taylor was a trailblazer for bolt-on acoustic necks – something now commonplace in the industry. This allows bodies and necks to be finished separately, so in this case the body is gloss and the neck is satin. A Taylor I reviewed several years ago had a gap between the heel cap and binding that was filled by a gummy white paste, but I'm pleased to report this guitar's neck joint is flawless and paste-free.

Bob Taylor's concern for the sustainability of tonewoods is well known, and his company's approach to neck construction may not please some purists, but it keeps down waste. We're looking at tropical mahogany >



The wide ebony fretboard makes accurate playing pleasingly achievable

KEY FEATURES

Taylor 858e

- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic 12-string guitar, made in the USA
- **PRICE** £3,284
- **BUILD** Sitka spruce top with Indian rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ebony bridge and fingerboard, rosewood peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, nickel plated die-cast tuners, Tusq nut and saddle, maple bindings, ebony bridge pins with abalone dots and abalone rosette
- **ELECTRICS** Taylor Expression II system
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, at no extra charge
- **FINISH** Gloss body with satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648 mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 47mm at nut, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 41.5mm at nut, 61.5mm at bridge (outside Es)
- **WEIGHT** 2.4kg/5.2lbs
- **CONTACT** Big Fish Studios 01206 382224 **www.taylorguitars.com**

TAYLOR 858E £3,284
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

The 858e's headstock has an attractive rosewood overlay and maple binding

The Expression II system has a master volume and two tone controls next to the stacked heel

with a stacked heel and a scarf jointed headstock. The headstock has a rosewood overlay and, like the body and ebony fretboard, maple binding. The nut and compensated saddle are Tusq, and behind the saddle are three circular inserts. They're noticeable upon close inspection only because they're jet black, but these are the piezo sensors for Taylor's Expression II system. So why are the sensors behind the saddle rather than under it?

The idea that string vibration causes a soundboard to move backwards and forwards like a loudspeaker is more applicable to archtop than flat-top guitars. With flat tops, the bridge rocks back and forth along the line of the strings. Taylor's electronics designer David Hosler concluded the strings' pressure on the saddle restricted movement, which is a cause of the thin and unnatural tone associated with undersaddle piezo transducers.

The piezo sensors can be calibrated individually by tiny allen head screws, and they combine with Taylor's custom-designed onboard preamp. The controls are identical to the original Expression system, but the preamp's gain structure has been altered to increase output and bring it more in line with pickup systems from other manufacturers. Battery access is external, with a hatch adjacent to the combination jack socket/strap button on the tail block.

In use

The 858e has a slim neck with a wide fingerboard, helping to prevent the feel becoming too daunting, while the extra width aids the string spacing. Some 12-strings feel cramped and demand accuracy when you are picking out notes or playing fingerstyle, but after a short period of familiarisation I found it easy to be accurate on the 858e.

Equally, some-12 strings are over-built, but the 858e is responsive and dynamic, even with a light touch. Spruce and rosewood accentuate the highs and focus the lows, and the slight mid scoop is beautifully judged because it keeps the sound clear and boom-free.

The 858e has a slim neck with a wide fingerboard. The slimness helps to prevent the feel becoming too daunting

When I need a 12-string sound in the studio, I generally use a Nashville-strung six-string, or I end up radically equalising and compressing the sound to get the airy chime without the track-filling clutter. The 858e produces almost an idealised 12-string sound without any electronic assistance, however solo performers who need an old-school bassy and muscular 12-string accompaniment may feel otherwise.

The bass is full without being dominant or overbearing, the high strings have a harpsichord-like quality and the sound is more about flow than thump. This guitar can certainly be big and loud, but it can do delicate and subtle equally well. The 858e is also the most in-tune 12-string I've played. Troublesome cowboy chords and Townshend powerchords with open and fretted strings all ring true and clear.

The Expression II produces a healthy output level and the tone is fuller and less squawky than a typical undersaddle piezo. More fully featured equalisation or a notch filter would make it even better, because the low end can feed back. The treble is sweet and fairly natural, but there are other after-market pickup systems with even better audio quality and there's no built-in tuner or polarity switching.

Returning to that 80s advert, Taylor claimed its 12-string was "easier to play than most six-strings" and it played "in tune all the way up the neck". In those days, being a 12-string player demanded strength and commitment, and Taylor earned a reputation for building the easiest-playing 12-strings. The 858e maintains the company tradition, and the current crop of Taylors is going from strength to strength.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Featuring a slotted headstock, the **Guild Orpheum £2,865** has an orchestra body size, solid red spruce top and solid rosewood back and sides, compensated bone saddle and natural nitrocellulose finish. Solid maple and sitka spruce combine on the **Guild F512 £2,947**. The **Bourgeois Banjo Killer Slope D £3,599** has a solid sitka spruce top with figured mahogany back and sides and Waverley tuners with lightweight ivoroid buttons.

Guitar Class VERDICT

+ Balanced, focused and dynamic tone
+ Excellent intonation
+ Easy playing for a 12
+ Includes hardshell case

– Some glue squeeze-out inside body
– We're not 100 per cent sold on the Expression II system

Undoubtedly a beautiful looking and great sounding guitar that plays flawlessly. Under the watchful eye of Andy Powers, Taylor is making its finest instruments to date. The 858e is far from cheap, but this is a 12-string for life

9/10

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FAITH NAKED VENUS CUT £529
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

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Faith Naked Venus Cut

The Venus is an all-solid mahogany cutaway with onboard electronics. **HUW PRICE** is out of the blue and into the brown...

There's no doubt about it, Faith makes an awful lot of guitars. The range is divided into no fewer than 10 different series, and this month's Venus comes from the planetary-themed Naked range.

This curious choice of name reflects Patrick James Eggle's design ethos. He explains: "Each of the Faith Naked instruments is 100 per cent solid tonewood – in keeping with all other Faith series. However, the cosmetics and non-essential dressing has been stripped away, leaving the guitars in their natural, Naked state."

It's also claimed that the satin finish allows the tonewoods unrestricted movement and the ability to breathe. However, there is no body binding and Faith's website warns the Naked Venus "will happily show the battle scars of every musical encounter". So take care if you're not a fan of the relic'd look.

Despite fears that the Naked Venus might look not unlike a door panel from a 1970s suburban semi, in the flesh, so to speak, the body has an attractive red brick hue with a fair bit of flamey figuring. The website distinguishes between the body's Indonesian mahogany and the less specific 'mahogany' of the neck.

The neck has a muddier brown appearance and the finish both looks and feels slightly different. Apparently, the body benefits from a two-stage satin finish, whereas the neck is plain old satin. Consequently, the body is smoother to the touch than the back of the neck, which some may feel is the wrong way round. There is also some murky finish build-up around the rosewood heel cap and some sanding marks on the heel adjacent to the neck joint. The blues and greens of the abalone rosette really pop next to the mahogany; it's so striking that the regular pearl logo on the headstock may seem like a bit of a letdown, but it does match the elegant 12th-fret inlay.

Measuring 15 inches across the lower bout and 4.25 inches deep, the Naked Venus is comfortably compact

Measuring 15 inches across the lower bout and 4.25 inches deep, the Naked Venus is comfortably compact. The fingerboard is black bound in order to conceal the fret ends, and it matches the NuBone nut and saddle, as well as the hardware.

Located conveniently on the upper bout, there's a Faith-branded but Shadow-manufactured control panel for the onboard pickup system. In addition to the battery hatch, you get an onboard tuner and polarity switching plus volume, bass and treble controls. There are a few minor >

The pretty abalone rosette provides a striking contrast against the solid mahogany top

KEY FEATURES

Faith Naked Venus Cut

- **PRICE** £529
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic six-string cutaway guitar, made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany top, back and sides, mahogany neck, rosewood bridge and fingerboard, rosewood peghead overlay, 14th-fret neck join, black chrome die-cast tuners, NuBone nut and saddle, ebony bridge pins with abalone dots and abalone rosette
- **ELECTRICS** Shadow preamp and pickup
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Clear Satin
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648 mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 25mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2kg/4.4lbs
- **CONTACT** Barnes & Mullins 01691 652449 **www.faithguitars.com**

FAITH NAKED VENUS CUT £529
ACOUSTIC GUITAR

The Faith logo on the headstock matches the mother of pearl 'F' inlay at the 12th fret

The Shadow control panel is located tidily on the upper bout

finishing imperfections, but overall the construction has been executed to a fairly high standard. The full neck profile has a late-50s Gibson sort of feel that many players will find comfortable, and the string action is fairly low but buzz- and rattle-free.

The Naked Venus does the depression-era mahogany tone convincingly, but the looks are bang up to date

In use

I should probably confess from the outset that I really like all-mahogany acoustics. What's more, in the period immediately prior to the Naked Venus' arrival I had been listening to Nick Drake's album *Pink Moon* and, as always, marvelling at his guitar tone.

There is some controversy about what guitar Drake played. Some say it was a Martin D-28, but most believe it was either a Guild M-20 or a Martin 00-15. Drake's tone sounds nothing like a D-28 to my ears, so my money would be on one of the all-mahogany models.

In the spirit of sonic exploration, I dropped the tuning down to CGCFCE, put a capo on the second fret and gave it a go. Although I'll never be able to play like Nick Drake, the Naked Venus' mellow, woody and intimate voicing sounds very convincing to me. All I needed to seal the deal was a set of really dead strings.

The Naked Venus is certainly not lacking in treble response, but it's nowhere near as bright or harmonically supercharged as spruce guitars. It's a drier tone with a softer upper-midrange that brings chord voicings to the front rather than obscuring them beneath a chiming top end and thumping bass.

Earlier, I described the tone as intimate, and when you're playing the Naked Venus it can seem that way. Later, when I showed the Naked Venus to another guitar player, he remarked on its loudness, and it turned out that the guitar's tone is affected greatly by the acoustic environment.

Played with a plectrum, thumb pick or fingernails, it has a firm tone with bold definition. However, it can sound subdued and a bit lifeless when you use the fleshy parts of your thumb and fingers. That's when the potential downside of an all-mahogany body may become apparent for some.

With new bronze strings, there is a slightly metallic and crashy quality that lends itself nicely to blues and ragtime picking. It's a convincingly rootsy tone that's enhanced by relatively short sustain and the absence of harmonics lingering on inside the box. The bass isn't strong enough for bluegrass playing, and even in open tunings the Naked Venus doesn't really pull off 'ethereal'.

Moving on to the electronics, the Shadow system impressed from the outset. Although the transducer is an undersaddle piezo, with the treble and bass controls set dead-centre the tone was full, sonorous and even. The treble was refined and the low frequencies exhibited good feedback resistance.

It's the full package, too, with polarity switching and an onboard tuner. I appreciated the fact that the tuner operates without any need to plug in a cable, and the results are very accurate. In fact, it outclassed the slightly sloppy machineheads, and I did find the intonation a bit off – especially in dropped tunings.

The Naked Venus does the dry depression-era mahogany tone convincingly, but the looks are bang up to date. The black and mahogany theme is pleasing to the eye and the unfussy styling with minimal decoration is smartly stylish. Overall, this is a very attractive guitar with upgrade potential and impressive tone quality at an affordable price.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Guild M-20** **£1,191** also has a solid mahogany body but no pickup or cutaway. **Framus' FF-14MCE** **£313** has a cutaway body with a solid mahogany top plus a Fishman Isys+. The **Recording King ROS-616** **£457** is a traditional 12-fret OOO with solid mahogany body, bone nut and saddle, herringbone binding and nitrocellulose finish.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Authentic all-mahogany tone
+ Really good neck profile
+ Nice-sounding pickup system
+ Onboard tuner

– Slight finish imperfections
– Some may find the tone bass- and treble-shy
– Sloppy tuners
– Intonation a bit off

A very playable guitar with all-mahogany tone and an impressive pickup system

8/10

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- Protective rain cover
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- Body Block internal shock absorber
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- Internal cable management
- Sheet music pocket

Model	Fits
G-PG ELECTRIC	Electric Guitar
G-PG BASS	Bass Guitar
G-PG ELEC 2X	2 Electric Guitars
G-PG BASS 2X	2 Bass Guitars
G-PG ACOUSTIC	Acoustic Guitar

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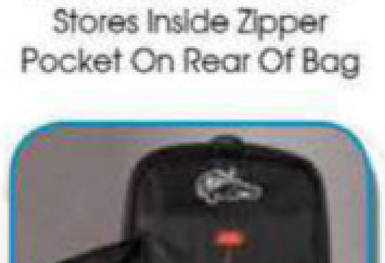

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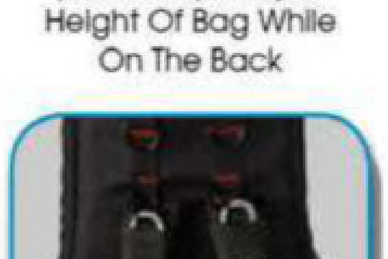

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T-Rex Replicator

A fully analogue tape echo unit that uses real tape, while offering modern features and reliability? **SAM ATKINS** is all ears...

KEY FEATURES

T-Rex Replicator

- **PRICE** £599
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue tape echo pedal with multiple functions including two expression inputs, powered by 24V DC, centre negative power supply (included)
- **CONTROLS** Master level, chorus, saturate, delay level, feedback, delay time, on/off switch, heads switch, chorus switch, tap switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 235x70x173mm
- **WEIGHT** 1.9kg/4.1lbs
- **CONTACT** Westside Distribution 0844 326 2000 **www.t-rex-effects.com**

Now that summer is on the way and January's 2016 NAMM Show is a distant memory, we want you to cast your mind back further, to NAMM 2015. Of all the product launches, there was one in particular that provoked GAS panic in every delay-addicted guitarist: a 100 per cent analogue, real tape echo/delay machine that not only emulates the sounds of those bulky and at times frustratingly temperamental machines of yesteryear (or even the rebooted units from Fulltone), but uses old-school tape and delivers the modern-day convenience we now expect.

The Replicator delivers a real, old-school tape delay sound with a feature set dragged into the present day, including tap tempo, chorus and more

The T-Rex Effects Replicator was no rush-release. Instead, the team decamped from the Californian sunshine back to the cooler climes of Denmark bathing in a halo of positive noise from guitarists, the guitar press, social media and online forums.

What the company came back with is a tape echo unit that is, sort of, pedalboard-friendly, delivering a real, old-school tape delay sound with a feature set dragged into the present day. This includes tap tempo, chorus and two expression pedal inputs (more on these later).

It's not often that we comment on packaging, but T-Rex has certainly thought of every detail in delivering this premium product. Opening the large brown box emblazoned with the T-Rex logo, you are faced with a brown vinyl carry case with white beading that's reminiscent of an old 70s vinyl school satchel. You get a spare tape cartridge, a tape head cleaning kit, a 24-volt power adaptor and a sealed envelope with a message inside from the T-Rex team, along with a quick start guide.

The Replicator measures a little less than 10 inches long and seven inches wide, and when you lift the unit out of the box be prepared for a weighty 2kg load. That said, a large pedalboard with plenty of real estate will be adequate to house it, as *G&B* has discovered after spending a good month using the Replicator for studio work and live band sessions.

The Danes strive for 'hygge' (pronounced hue-gah), which is about making the ordinary special and meaningful. So have they succeeded in making the Replicator a hygge item for guitarists the world over?

In use

There are plenty of features for us to get our proverbial teeth into, so let's start with the basics. Using the supplied 24-volt DC power supply to fire up the Replicator, we plugged our Fender Stratocaster – and later a Les Paul – into the mono-only input. Our amp of choice was a trusty Fender '68 Custom Princeton using the mono-only output. With those choices out of the way, we were up and running – there are no complicated start-up procedures and there's no waiting for software to boot up: we're in the analogue world here.

With the master on/off button in the off position, the Replicator is totally silent because the tape doesn't move over the recording heads. When you kick it on, the unit comes alive. The unique and, we have to say, brilliantly designed tape cartridge begins its job of sending the tape across the

recording heads, and the delay sound we achieve immediately with the controls set quite subtly is a gloriously rich, deep and creamy echo delay tone.

Selecting the various recording heads can be done quickly via a dedicated footswitch, which has a handy LED indicator (green for the first tape head, red for the second and orange for both), giving us complete control over the playback heads.

Using tape head one gives us the longest delay times (250-1,200ms), and the second tape head the shortest (125-600ms), but using both is where the magic happens. In this mode, the first head feeds back via the second head's feedback path, so what we get is a rhythmic delay pattern The Edge would be proud of.

The onboard motor driving the tape cartridge (think back to those days of recording the Top 40 on your cassette deck) produces a little noise, but none of that is translated to the amp. This is 100 per cent analogue audio technology, with the only digital processing coming from the tap tempo footswitch sending signals to the motor to drive the tape speed.

The Replicator provides control over the typical parameters: the volume level of the repeats, feedback, controls for how fast or slow the repeats are and a master volume to control the overall output.

We make no apology for the joyful giddiness that comes in the next part of the review. Switching on the chorus, yes chorus, we enter a new level of lush shimmery delay tones. There is a dedicated chorus control, with which you can add a little or a lot of depth to the overall sound. The chorus effect modulates the pitch of the delay signal, and the pitch sways woozily as if you are gently using a whammy bar. Users of vintage tape echo/delay units will recognise this effect as it sounds like a worn tape or, at extreme settings, their unit having mechanical issues! The boffins at T-Rex have worked hard to appease vintage tape aficionados and modern delay pedal users alike.

The Replicator also has the ability to control the recording level (badged up as 'saturation' on the pedal). Turning the control level up will saturate the signal, with an LED on the unit telling us this is happening. Setting the level slightly lower ensures a clean signal with minimal noise, but what we enjoy the most is saturating the signal and playing with overdriven and fuzzy tones.

And, finally, we get to the secret sauce of the Replicator. On the rear of the unit is a kill dry button, which mutes the direct signal, and two expression pedal inputs – one for the motor, giving us control over the delay speed, and the other for the feedback. The expression pedal controlling the feedback brings out the biggest smiles, because it gives us total control over our signal from all-out self-oscillation and back to the minimum amount of delay.

Finally, and unavoidably, we must mention the price, as it has to be taken into consideration. It's not cheap, but there's no denying that the Replicator is a premium product that has been made meticulously, with no corners cut during the testing and development phases – and all of that R&D costs money.

We've had a very enjoyable month using the Replicator in myriad settings, from bedroom practice to the recording studio and, finally, the stage. Never once did we fear that the pedal would let us down when used in anger, which is a strange concept to get your head around if you are used to using a temperamental vintage tape echo unit. Maintenance is pretty straightforward too: replacing the cartridge takes less than 30 seconds, and cleaning the recording heads with a little alcohol on a cotton bud keeps everything running smoothly.

So, is it worth the investment? If you're a serious tonehound for whom analogue tape delay is central to your live or recorded sound then yes. If you're a casual delay user, think twice. Did *G&B* experience 'hygge' when using the Replicator? Ja!

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

- + Studio-quality real tape echo/delay tones
- + Analogue technology without the clunkiness of a vintage unit
- + User-friendly cartridge replacement and maintenance
- + Plenty of controls to shape your sound, including two expression pedal inputs
- + Solid build with attractive looks
- + Perfect for professional recording environments and stage use

- - Price point may be out of reach for some players
- - A large and bulky addition to your pedalboard

A serious investment that will return sonic nirvana for those looking for vintage tape delay with modern features. It's a niche product but T-Rex has poured a great deal of love and intelligence into the R&D process and come up trumps

9/10

Like this? Try these...

Analogue tape echo effects, especially those as fully-featured and reliable as the Replicator, are far from common, but here's a trio of viable options for tape echo tone at different price points...

Fulltone Solid State Tape Echo **£749**

This is the obvious alternative if you're looking for a premium real tape echo/delay unit. Based on the Echoplex EP-3, the SSTE is a wonderful-sounding tape delay but, like the Replicator, it comes at a hefty price and will need plenty of TLC to keep it in working order.

Strymon El Capistan **£249**

Strymon is one of the finest purveyors of delay and reverb and The El Capistan is the Californian company's stellar digital recreation of an analogue tape delay. It has three different tape machines and plenty of controls.

Mooer Ana Echo **£42**

For those seeking a budget alternative, the tiny Ana Echo uses an analogue delay circuit with a range of 20ms to 300ms. It does a great job of providing creamy delay sounds, from slapback echo to short delays.

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ThorpyFX Warthog

Adrian does 'rocky' with an American flavour. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** goes the whole 'hog...

Following last month's in-depth look at British Army Major Adrian Thorpe's Peacekeeper low-gainer, here we turn our attention to a very different animal from the same stable as 2015's Gunshot, an award winner in these very pages. Where the Peacekeeper is all about boosting and augmenting your core tone, the Warthog (war and peace... geddit?) is designed to bring the filth.

Thorpe explains: "The Warthog was designed at the same time as the Gunshot. I wanted it to complement the Gunshot, and consequently it has a flatter, less mid-focused EQ – and it can get cleaner and much dirtier, too; at the far reaches of the calibre and gain knobs it is fuzzy in its breakup. If I had to sum up the Warthog, I'd say its distortion characteristics were American in flavour – eg, a driven tweed amp through to higher gain."

In common with the other ThorpyFX pedals we've tested, construction standards are very high; the Neutrik jack sockets and true-bypass footswitch – rated at many thousands of cycles – are off-board to maximise road-worthiness, while WIMA and Panasonic capacitors, a Burr Brown op amp and metal film resistors with a one per cent tolerance give the internals a premium vibe. Externally, Thorpy's now-familiar laser-etched stainless steel enclosure is paired with a 'faded sonic blue' powder-coated base plate and red mini chickenhead knobs. It looks great and our only quibble is that the mirror-like stainless steel makes the control panel lettering hard to read from a standing position under stage lights. Still, it doesn't take long to learn what each of the four knobs does. Aside from gain and volume, the tone control rolls off high end as you turn it up, and the calibre brings a 'secret sauce' of saturation, grit and heat to the table.

Imagine a great Rat pedal that occupies the space between overdrive and fuzz, minus the over-compressed response

In use

Anyone with a fondness for 1990s American alternative rock will love the Warthog. Imagine a great Rat pedal that occupies the space between overdrive and fuzz, minus the over-compressed response that often stops a Rat cutting through live. With the calibre and gain cranked, the Warthog delivers a joyful brand of carnage; a kind of fuzz-meets-distortion that's almost Muff-like in its saturation to the extent that you can pull off *Siamese Dream*-era Smashing Pumpkins riffs and solos but, crucially, you won't disappear in the mix or experience a total meltdown.

Back off the calibre control and the voicing is more amp-like, albeit a 6L6 or 6V6-loaded amp working hard. Roll the calibre clockwise again, but this time tame the gain to find Nirvana and early Foo Fighters tones. We wish this pedal had existed in 1994 because, unlike the DS-1 (too quiet), Rat (too compressed) and Big Muff (disappears in a band) pedals on countless garage floors in the mid-90s, the Warthog has the headroom, punch and grit to give your sound a sufficiently aggressive kick. And it sounds great. Oh to be 15 again...

KEY FEATURES

ThorpyFX Warthog

- **PRICE** £185
- **DESCRIPTION** True-bypass overdrive/distortion pedal powered by 9v centre-negative power supply or battery, made in UK
- **CONTROLS** Gain, tone, volume, calibre
- **DIMENSIONS** 70mm(w) x145mm(d)x60mm(h)
- **CONTACT** thorpyfx.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Raw, loud and obnoxious rock tones
+ Calibre control is a tone-shaping secret weapon
+ Premier league build quality justifies the price

- Hard to read etched control panel under stage lighting

From raw overdrive to fuzzy alt.rock distortion, the Warthog is a monster

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Fulltone OCD £119** is a punchy overdrive with plenty of grit and more than enough gain for dirty alternative rock, grunge and plenty more. **ProCo**'s **Rat £69** is an alt.rock classic but it doesn't work for everyone. The **T-Rex Mudhoney II £129** has two channels of dirt to play with.

Oil City Pickups

Oil City's pickups exude the spirit of the Thames Delta. **HUW PRICE** tries the Winterizer II, Wapping Wharf and HonkyTonk Angel

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Winterizer II Full HB Set

Unsurprisingly, there aren't many like-for-like alternatives to the Winterizer II. The only one we've found is the **Fralin Big Single**, and it's so new that Fralin hasn't even published a price yet. You may find that innovative builders such as Mojo and The Creamery can make something similar as a custom order.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Wapping Wharf & HonkyTonk Angel

Other companies make tapped T-type coils, but many are designed to cool down a hot pickup rather than warm up something vintage-spec. Check out the **Seymour Duncan '53 Tapped Tele Set £269** or **The Creamery**'s **Tapped Tele Bridge £75**, which can be ordered with whatever magnets and wire gauge you prefer.

It's really encouraging when pickup manufacturers combine the usual vintage-inspired suspects with products that are a bit more specialised. Oil City's product range includes some intriguing twists on a few tried and trusted designs. This month, we're checking out Firebird pickups in a PAF-sized format and a tapped vintage-style T-type.

Winterizer II

Covered mini humbucker replacement pickups are relatively thin on the ground as it is, but very few are available in a full-sized humbucker format. The Winterizer II set is designed for players who want to achieve the covered mini humbucker tone popularised by Johnny Winter and Neil Young, without having to buy a specific guitar or irreversibly convert an existing one.

Although the full-sized Winterizer II sits under a regular-sized cover, it's obvious that Oil City is not cheating with regular-sized bobbins. Wide open spaces under the cover are evidence that mini humbucker bobbins have been used.

Oil City told us that the Winterizer pickups are "exactly like real Firebird pickups". The recipe involves 42 AWG plain enamel wire and an alnico 5 bar magnet for each bobbin. There is also a steel plate under the pickup bobbins to increase the pickup's inductance.
For the purposes of this test, I dropped the Winterizers into a high-end Japanese LP-type with 500K CTS potentiometer and paper/oil tone capacitors wired 50s style.

These are incredibly expressive blues and rock pickups and they're absolutely superlative for playing slide

In use

It's worth establishing from the outset that Firebird pickups are far removed from humbucker and P-90 tones. In terms of sheer brightness, this set has more in common with Strats than Les Paul Standards. However, the tone is smoother, the output is higher and there's no hum.

Once I got my head around the notion of loud, single-coil type sounds coming out of a Les Paul, I really started to have fun. Played clean, these pickups are sensitive and extremely articulate. Although bright, notes and chords have substantial midrange and you hear woody follow-through after the initial metallic attack.

The bridge pickup has a wiry and slightly nasal honk that's funky when clean then snarly and slightly raw with overdrive. In contrast, the neck lends an almost semi-acoustic quality to the wound strings with a rounded singing sustain across the treble strings.

These are incredibly expressive blues and rock pickups and they're absolutely superlative for slide. Down in Vestapol, with a pipe on the pinky, the Winterizers deliver raucous bar-room tones with harmonics and 'ghost tone' friction noises cutting straight through the dirt. Heady stuff.

Wapping Wharf & HonkyTonk Angel

Some of us can remember adverts for tapped single-coil pickups back in the 80s. The idea is to 'interrupt' the coil at somewhere around a standard vintage-spec DC reading then add a few thousand extra turns that can be

storemags.com

switched in when the 'overwound' tone is appropriate. It's certainly a cool concept, but for some reason tapped single coils have never really caught on.

The Wapping Wharf is a tapped Tele pickup with some very clever twists. It starts off as a regular HonkyTonk Angel bridge pickup, which is Oil City's take on early-50s Esquire and Broadcaster tones. Rated at 10k, you may think it sounds a bit over-wound to begin with, but the magnet wire is vintage-correct 43 AWG.

Since this is thinner than Fender's later 42 AWG wire, you can achieve a higher DC resistance with fewer turns. So, despite the 10k reading, the HonkyTonk Angel side of the pickup is not over-wound at all; there's enough space remaining on the bobbin for a tapped coil that brings the total DC reading up to 15k.

The slugs are all alnico, but Oil City mixes up the alloys. Alnico 5 is used for the wound strings and alnico 2 for the treble strings. The stronger alnico 5 is intended to produce a healthy output with plenty of treble and twang and the weaker alnico 2 sounds sweeter and the lower magnetic pull on the strings can only help sustain.

To complete this review set, Oil City provided us with a HonkyTonk Angel neck pickup. Everything about the spec seems vintage-correct, with low-pull alnico 3 slugs, 43 AWG magnet wire wound to 6.8k, a chrome-plated nickel cover and cloth-covered leadout wires. For testing, I installed this set in a blackguard replica with a lightweight swamp ash body and one-piece maple neck.

In use

The Wapping Wharf spoils you for tonal choice. In low-wind mode, it's a top-drawer Tele-style pickup with twangy but meaty lows and a harmonically complex treble response that cuts through without any hint whatsoever of shrillness. The string-to-string balance cannot be faulted and there's a touch of microphony, adding acoustic 'air' without any squeal.

Chugging away on the low strings, you get a woody chunkiness with a clicky pick attack sharpening the definition. Play near the neck and single notes sound fully rounded with a vintage quack that's just sufficient to provide sonic character without being dominant.

Move the pick closer to the saddles and you can get the metallic twang some may associate with Roy Buchanan. Pinched harmonics fly off the strings, and although there's plenty of dynamic response, the treble string attack is smooth enough to play pedal steel licks without compressor assistance.

Switching in the extra coil boosts the overall level very slightly, but the tone change is far more apparent. Compressed transients and a midrange boost accompany some treble roll-off as the Wapping Wharf moves towards a P-90 growl. It's a fat Tele-like tone that is certainly less 'traditional' than the low-wind mode, but it delivers the goods for big powerchords, rock riffs and meaty soloing.

The neck pickup is less microphonic than most vintage-inspired replacements, but there's no lack of dynamics or definition. Oil City has achieved just the right amount of cover-induced treble attenuation to soften the attack and enhance the jazzy woodiness.

Single notes on the treble strings have a vowel-like rounded quality and jazz chord voicings are easy to discern thanks to an emphasis on the fundamental frequency rather than harmonic overtones. Achieving clarity without brightness is tough, but Oil City has pulled it off and the neck pickup balances really well with both modes of the bridge pickup.

The treble response is more consistent when the bridge pickup is in high-wind mode, but low-wind provides a more traditional contrast. It makes the in-between setting all the more distinctive and inspiring – induced mid-scoop combining with a pronounced phasiness that hints at a pseudo-chorus effect.

Oil City has made two outstanding sets of pickups. The Winterizers may be fairly niche, but if you want Firebird-like tone from a non-Firebird guitar, these pickups deliver.

Several years ago, I asked a well known boutique pickup maker about tapped single coils and he told me they don't really work. The evidence suggests otherwise. You could choose which mode you prefer and hard wire it, or switch between modes using a push-pull. Both sound fantastic and the HonkyTonk Angel pairs up perfectly.

KEY FEATURES

Winterizer II Full HB Set

- **PRICE** £170 (pair)
- **DESCRIPTION** Covered mini humbuckers in full-sized humbucker format, made in the UK
- **SPECS** 42 AWG plain enamel magnet wire, alnico 5 blade magnets, steel inductance plate, wax potted
- **CONTACT** Oil City Pickups 0208 257 0281 **www.oilcitypickups.co.uk**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Unique and impressive tone
+ Beautifully made
+ Sounds clear and well defined
+ Ample top end

- Single-coil brightness
- Lacks low-mid growl of a conventional PAF

The Winterizer set may be somewhat niche, but they're truly brilliant pickups that will enable you to nail that distinctive Firebird tone without having to buy a Firebird

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Wapping Wharf bridge & HonkyTonk Angel neck pickup

- **PRICE** £59 (bridge) £54 (neck)
- **DESCRIPTION** Early-50s spec T-type set with 10K/15K coil-switching bridge pickup, made in the UK
- **SPECS** 43 AWG magnet wire, alnico 2 & 5 magnets (bridge), alnico 3 magnets (neck), vulcanised fibreboard flat work, wax potted

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Outstanding old-school T-type tone
+ Bridge pickup does vintage/hot vintage
+ Sweet treble
+ Excellent sustain
+ Microphony without squeal

- Not for fans of 60s Tele tone
- No relicing

Even without the coil switching, this is one of the very finest T-type sets we have so far encountered. Factor in the switching and you get classic tone without any compromises

9/10

B&G BIG SISTER $3,450
BASS GUITAR

B&G Big Sister bass

Israel's B&G Guitars turned heads with its awesome Little Sister six-string last year. **ROD FOGG** meets its four-string sibling

B&G's Big Sister bass is inspired by the Little Sister guitar, reviewed with a great deal of enthusiasm in these pages in November 2015. The bodies of the two instruments are similar but not identical, the bass being a centimetre shorter and a centimetre wider. You can get a pretty good idea by comparing the Big Sister to a Les Paul guitar body – it's maybe a centimetre wider in the lower bout, which seems small for a bass. We'll have more to say on this later.

Our review model's mahogany body is topped with an eye-catching flamed maple top, which is a $250 upgrade. The top is flat, not arched like a Lester, and the amber sunburst has an abrupt transition to the dark red around the edge. The edge of the maple top has PRS-style scraped binding and, as you've probably realised, it's a semi-hollow, chambered affair with two shapely f-holes and a solid block under the bridge.

Other premium tonewoods include a Honduran mahogany neck ($300 extra) and a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, also $300. Even higher grades of top are available, rising to $450-$600 for a one-piece quilted maple which, judging by the standard of the top we have here, must be truly breathtaking.

The B&G bridge with the Big Sister logo is brass, the Amalfitano single coils have brass covers, and the Gotoh tuners, control cavity cover, truss rod cover – even the strap buttons – are, you guessed it, brass, or at least brass coloured. Great attention to detail, then, and the nitrocellulose finish is superb for smoothness and eveness of application; however, it's not perfect. There's a small lacquer run where the neck joins the body at the back, and the insides of the f-holes missed out on the yellow sunburst staining and gloss finish. This may not seem a major concern, and your audience would not see it, but PRS manages it on its hollowbodies, and if you look down at the body while familiarising yourself with the two volumes and single tone control you can't help noticing the mixture of bare wood and paint dribbles. No big deal, perhaps, and yes, I'm just being fussy, but it shouldn't be hard to put this right in the future.

In use

The full 34-inch scale neck and 20 tall thin frets are seated perfectly with no unexpected buzzes or rattles. The neck is comfortable in the hand and I can't imagine any bass player not feeling at home pretty much immediately, although the small body size may not suit everyone. The top horn of a Fender or similar bass means that the instrument sits a little more to the right when hanging on a strap. Without an upper horn, this guitar sits a little more to the left and, while it's not uncomfortable to play, that first fret can seem surprisingly distant. Seated with legs crossed, the bass sits up >

The neck is comfortable and I can't imagine any bass player not feeling at home pretty much immediately

Brass hardware adds to the boutique vibe

KEY FEATURES

B&G Big Sister

- **PRICE** $3,450 (plus $850 as reviewed)
- **DESCRIPTION** 4-string electric bass, made in Israel
- **BUILD** Chambered mahogany body with figured maple top, set Honduran mahogany neck with 20 tall thin nickel frets on a Brazilian rosewood fingerboard
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh tuners, B&G bridge, brass hardware
- **ELECTRICS** 2x passive Amalfitano single coils, 2x volume, 1x tone control
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.3mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **WEIGHT** 7.7lbs/3.5kg
- **FINISHES** Sunburst nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** www.bngguitars.com

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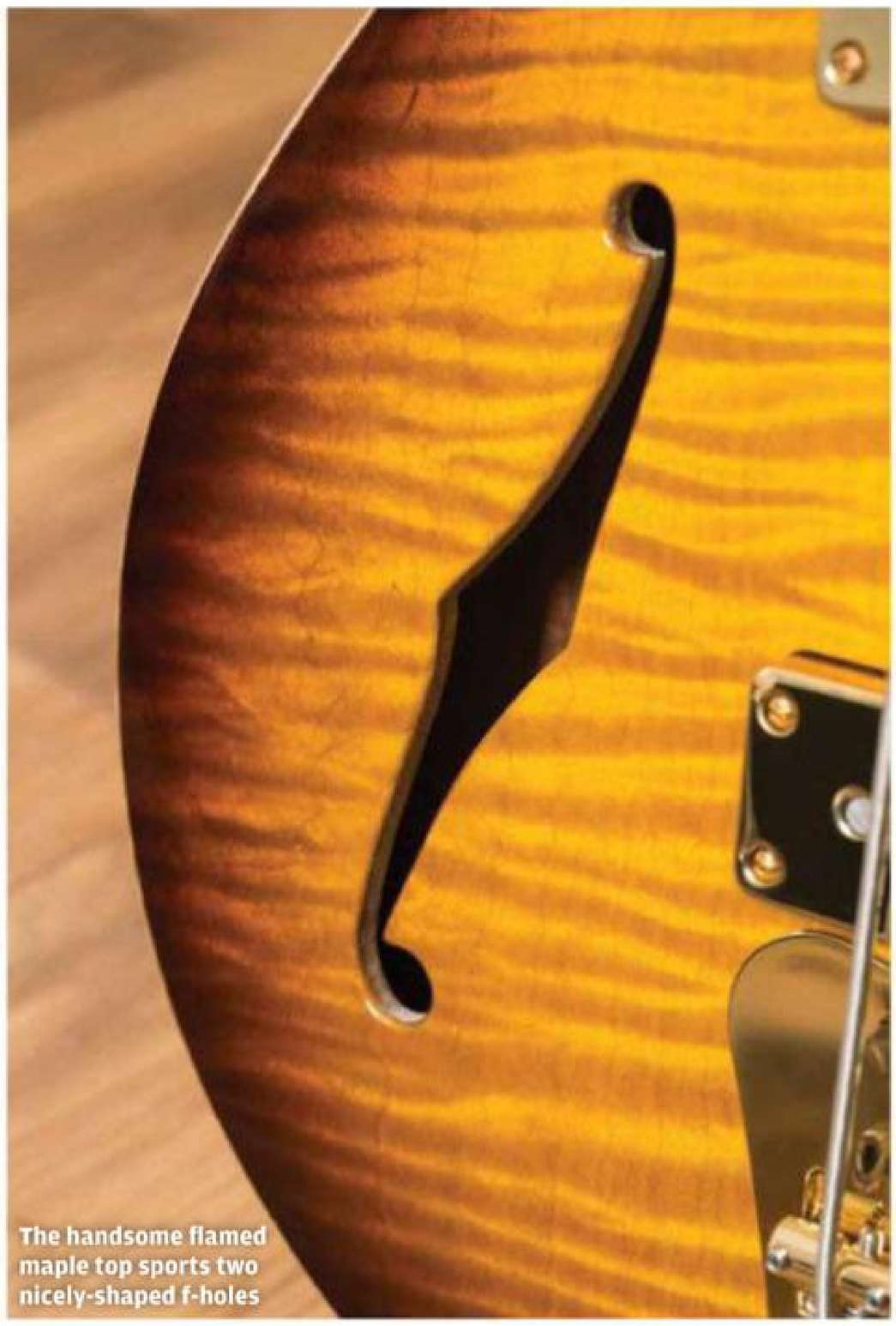

The handsome flamed maple top sports two nicely-shaped f-holes

The brass hardware theme extends to the Gotoh tuners

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson's **Memphis ES-Les Paul Bass $3,499** is a top-quality semi-hollowbody bass that will do the earthy rumble Gibson basses are famous for. It's short scale and available in Darkburst and Goldtop finishes – take your pick. The **PRS Grainger 4 String Bass £2,308** has a carved figured maple top and mahogany body but isn't a bit hollow. The pickups are active, so expect a less vintage-inspired sound. The **Reverend Dub King £691** features a semi-hollow body, set neck, short scale and a pair of humbuckers. And as we said in our review, there's plenty of air in its tones.

nicely and the deep cutaway ensures that high-fret access is excellent when seated or standing.

There is enough acoustic tone for practising at 3am and the sound is even over the whole bass. Plugging in, it does not disappoint. The bridge pickup is bright and articulate, its volume controlled by the middle of the three control knobs like a Fender Jazz bass. The tone control is well judged to remove fret clank, and played aggressively near the bridge the Big Sister produces an energised throaty bark. Played softly, this pickup also adds a subtle feathery quality.

Soloing the neck pickup produces a bigger and rounder sound, which is as expected, with the tone control adding the option to make things more mellow. It gets dark enough for Bob Marley-type tones without ever getting truly dubby. I spent a long time rolling one volume up and the other down to alternate between these two settings, and experimenting with the tone control.

The pickups can produce a wide range of sounds using nothing more than the tone controls and changes in playing style

There's a great deal of versatility here without the need to go anywhere near the amp. The ability to easily mix both pickups is the secret weapon of basses with this control layout. If you max the neck pickup and blend in a little of the bridge, the sound broadens – along with that smile that might have been forming at the corners of your mouth – as a subtle emphasis in the low mids is introduced, adding sustain, power and a refined liquid quality. Both pickups full-on are great for slap, but I kept returning to the mixed tone, with or without a slight roll-off of tone. This bass would be great for rock, blues, jazz, country... and with the help of amp controls we might be able to add in dub, reggae and metal; but it doesn't really do extremes – neither excessively bright and clanky on the bridge pickup nor dark and dubby on the neck pickup.

There's no doubt that this is a well-made instrument, using some of the finest tone woods and carefully considered hardware. Build quality is top-notch, despite the minor finishing imperfections we have noted. The pickups are sensitive and can produce a wide range of sounds using nothing more than the onboard tone controls and changes in playing style. That said, the contribution of the hollowbody design to the available sounds is, to say the least, subtle. The big, earthy tones associated with, say, a hollow Gibson bass are not available here. What you do get is an instrument that responds accurately to your fingers or to a pick. The Big Sister feels as good in the hand as a fine handmade instrument should, and it can deliver a broad range of the very best bass tones.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Beautiful use of tonewoods
+ Great range of usable sounds
+ Original and unique design

– Body shape might not suit everyone
– Some very minor finishing imperfections
– Max out the tonewoods and it gets expensive

The Big Sister features top-quality tonewoods married to an original, vintage-inspired design and produces a wide range of highly musical sounds

9/10

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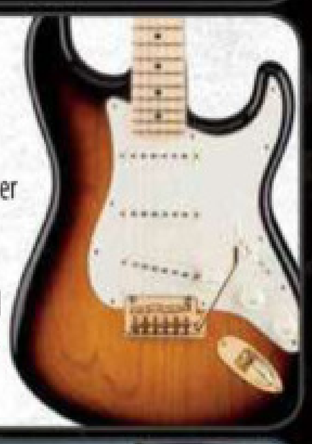

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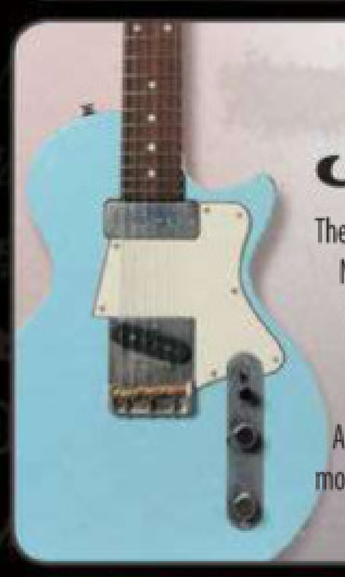

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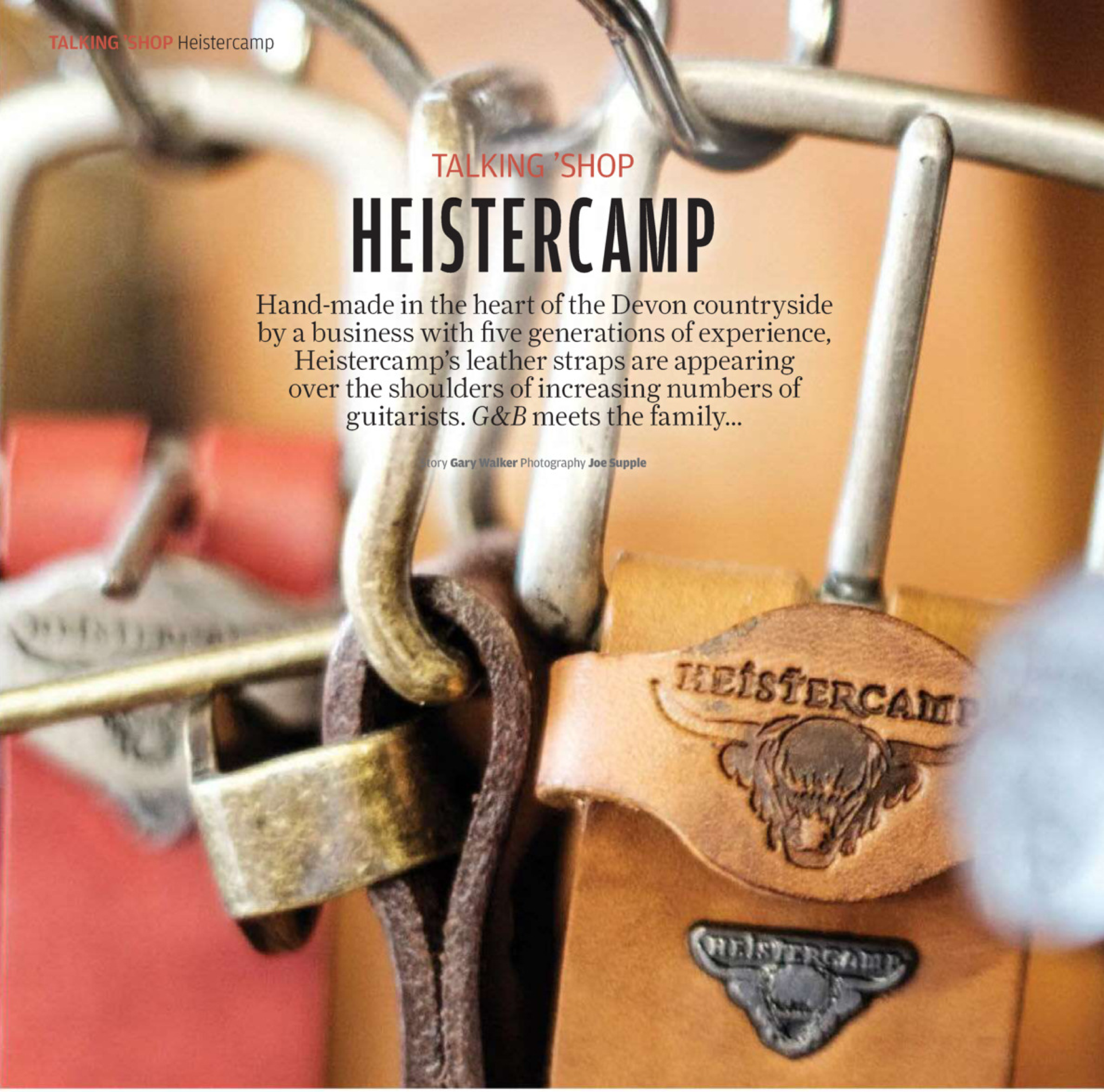
TALKING 'SHOP

HEISTERCAMP

Hand-made in the heart of the Devon countryside by a business with five generations of experience, Heistercamp's leather straps are appearing over the shoulders of increasing numbers of guitarists. *G&B* meets the family...

Story **Gary Walker** Photography **Joe Supple**



From the small Belgian town of Oostvleteren to the beautiful undulating green velvet hills and valleys of the Devon countryside, through five generations, the Heistercamp story is a tale of family values, its chapters spanning more than 130 years.

Back in 1884, Gustavus Heistercamp was renowned as a master of his trade, making and restoring fine leather shoes in his workshop in the province of West Flanders. His son, Camille, brought the business to the UK soon after the turn of the century, settling in Chesham, Buckinghamshire and setting up shop selling belts and handbags. Camille's son David was next to learn the family trade, taking over the running of the factory when his father retired, then opening a saddlery and shop which provided the foundation for Nigel's education in the business. Initially specialising in repairs, Nigel took the transformative steps of relocating to Devon, establishing the Heistercamp brand and introducing guitar straps to the range. Today, he runs the business with his wife Alaine and when the time comes will hand over to sons James and Craig – already integral parts of the business and learning the intricacies of this venerable trade.

The family's handsome chocolate box workshop, nestled between the hedgerows and winding rivers that zig-zag between the vast expanses of Dartmoor and Exmoor, remains a 100 per cent family-run operation. Their bespoke, vegetable-tanned leather guitar straps are produced entirely in-house. Nothing is outsourced, even the website is maintained by James and Alaine, and it's a formula that has seen the business boom, with their straps being used by some of the biggest names in music.

"The business has grown consistently, but the guitar straps have really taken off," says Nigel. "It was just Alaine and myself, then James joined the business two years ago and is a great asset. He does all the photography and makes all the belts, wallets and watchstraps. Guitar straps became a part of the business in 2009, and they've taken off so much that Craig came into the business to help. We're all partners, the boys became >

The custom-made buckles come in antique silver and brass, gold and pewter

The Heistercamp family (left to right): James, Alaine, Nigel and Craig

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Each member of the family has learnt to stitch

The machines in Heistercamp's workshop have been accrued over decades

business partners last year, and are steadily learning all parts and processes of the business."

The first thing that hits you when you walk into Heistercamp's Butstone Farm workshop, after negotiating the geese and pygmy goats that watch over this small wooden haven, is the smell. The rich, heady aroma of leather. Lots of it. Completed straps in shades such as chilli, turmeric, curry, anise, clove, cumin and peppercorn hang alongside portraits of the guitarists who use them, looking down on the array of vintage machines and tools gathered by the family over several decades. A window stretches the full length of the building, offering uninterrupted views of this unspoilt swathe of the south west. It's about as idyllic a workplace as you'll find.

"We find guitarists are very enthusiastic people, they send us photos of the straps on their guitars"

"We sort of take it for granted what a nice place it is," admits Nigel. "It's not until someone comes to visit and comments on it, and says 'oh what a nice place' that you think about it. I'm always either out there cutting grass or I'm in here in the workshop. James was just coming up to secondary school age when we decided to move here. In Buckinghamshire, it's all push push push. We'd always fancied a bit of land, but there's no way we could afford it up in Bucks, it's ridiculous money. We started looking at the odd small farm and this one came up in 1998."

The first prominent artist to use Heistercamp straps was New York singer-songwriter Willy Mason – and Ronnie Wood, Royal Blood's Mike Kerr, Savages, HAIM, Richard Hawley, Pendulum, Courtney Barnett and Nick Mulvey have since been added to the list of happy customers on their roster.

"We find guitarists are very enthusiastic people, they send us photos of the straps on their guitars in action. They often want one for every guitar they've got, and that's brilliant," says Nigel, who with the rest of the family regularly travels the 120 miles north to Bristol to discover new acts and indulge their passion for live music.

"I'd rather work directly with the acts if we can. They really like the straps. Mike Kerr's had quite a lot more since the initial one, Perry from Pendulum has had a couple, and Reef absolutely love them. You can't beat word of mouth, can you? We're big music fans ourselves and it adds to the satisfaction. You can get enthusiastic about a strap because of the band. Although we really enjoy making all of our products, we don't get to see them in the limelight like our guitar straps."

The strap-making process begins when one of the taeam selects a 54-inch square shoulder hide from 28 colour varieties, >

Nigel applying the Heistercamp logo to a freshly-made strap

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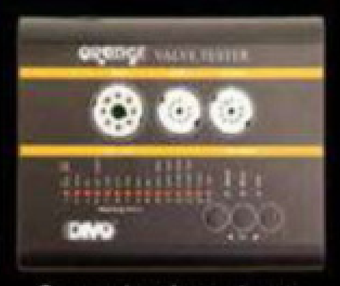

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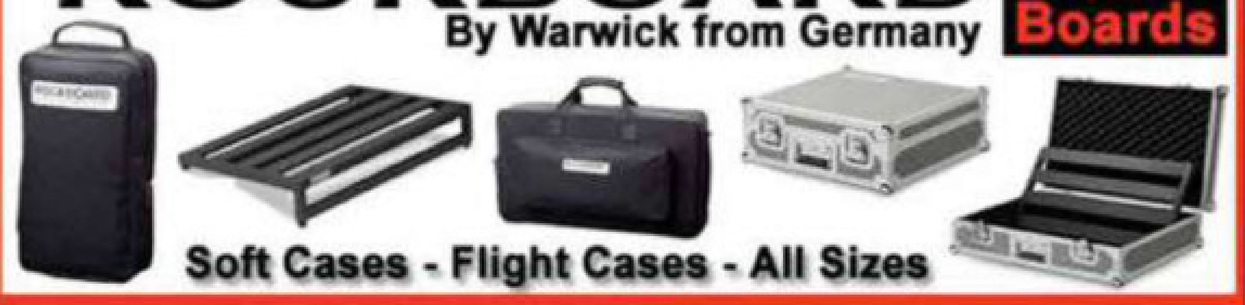

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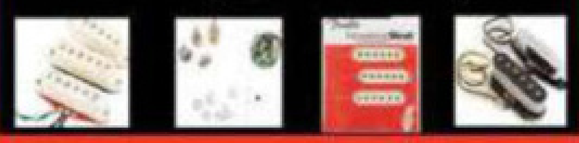

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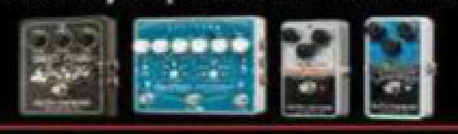

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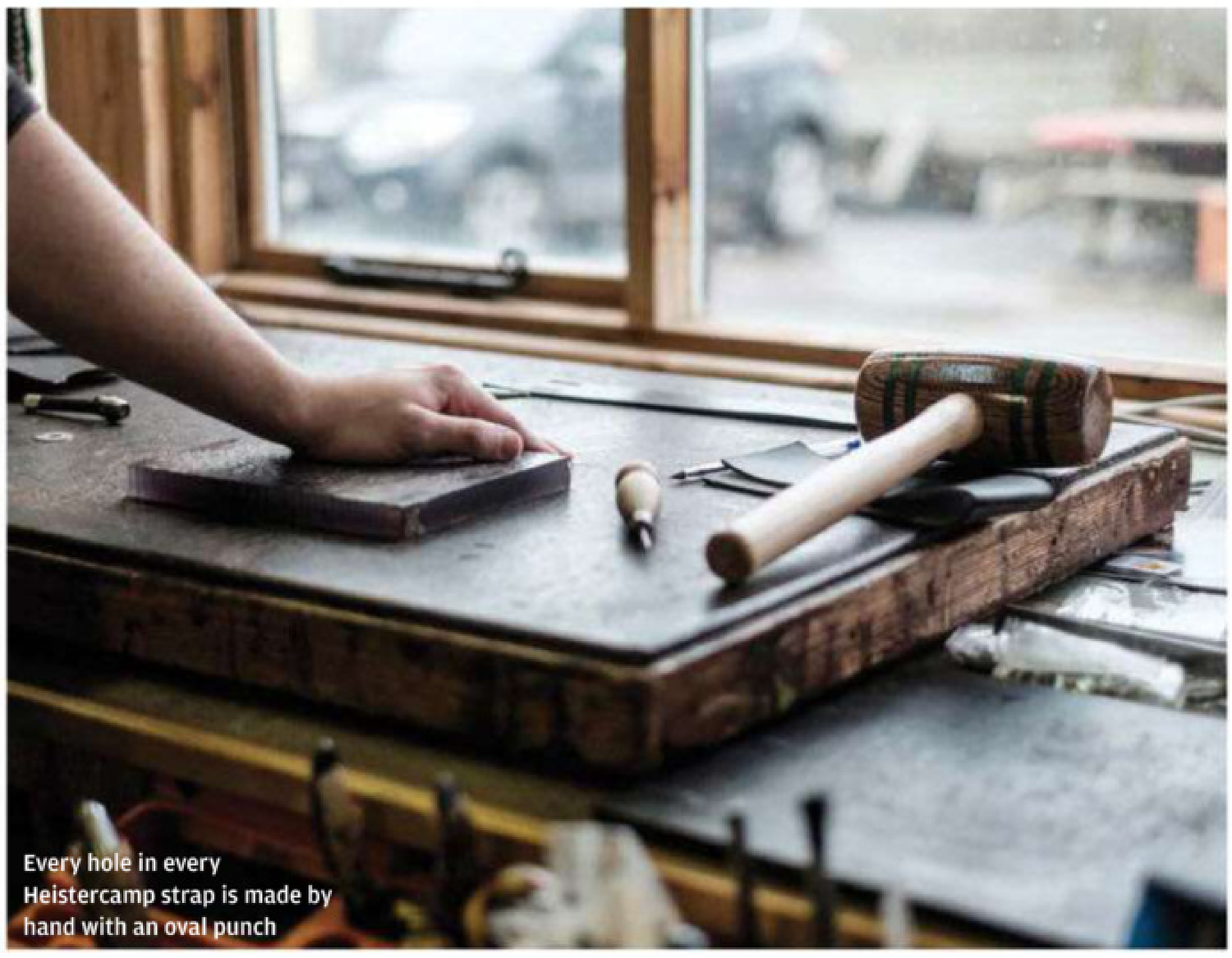
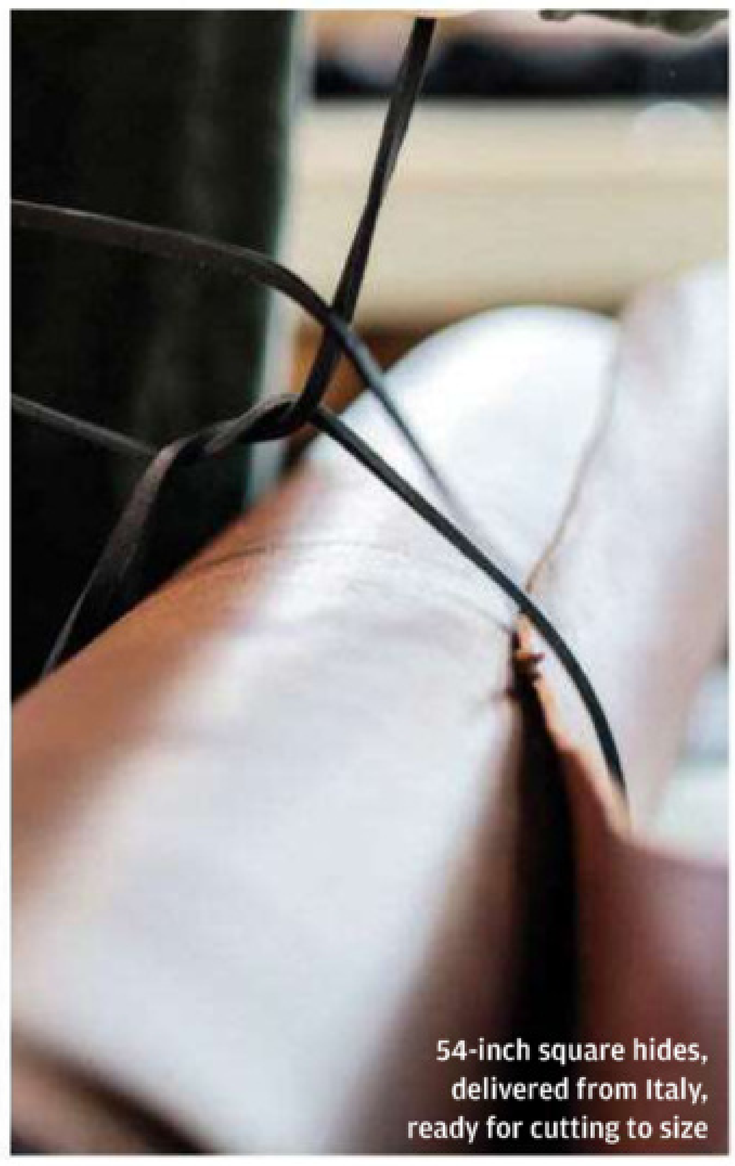


Every hole in every Heistercamp strap is made by hand with an oval punch



54-inch square hides, delivered from Italy, ready for cutting to size

sourced in Italy. They use a plough gauge to cut a strip of leather to size, a narrow strip is cut for the buckle pieces and a third strip is cut from either smooth leather or suede for the strap lining. The underside of the primary leather is roughened and glued to the lining before being cut out. The strap holes are made using an oval punch and lacquer is applied to the strap edges, the strap and buckle pieces are stictched in and holes are cut for standard button sizes or strap locks. Buckles in antique brass or silver, gold or pewter are fitted and the strap is given a final inspection before being cleared to leave the workshop.

While there's no such thing as a typical job, as each strap is spec'd by its future owner, the whole process can take around an hour. These are bespoke straps, and they don't come cheap, but the company prides itself on its personal service and its ethical ethos.

"We'd love it to all be British, but for the look and quality we're after we found Italian tanneries suit our needs perfectly," says Nigel.

"We don't like anything that isn't good for the environment. All our leathers are veg tanned, as opposed to being treated with chemicals, because we try to be as environmentaly friendly as possible.

"We always try to give the best service we can, and get a lot of comments about our service. We go the extra mile and try to make sure the customer always knows where their strap is in the process. We often get custom requests. Jack from Reef plays almost at knee height, so we had to make two extra-long straps for him and he loves them.

"Our straps will last. We offer a lifetime guarantee, so if anything goes wrong, which is very rare, we always put it right. It's like our belts – people will say they've lost weight and ask us to shorten it or put more holes in. It's service really. If you can offer a good service, people will talk about you. If there's an up-and-coming band we like, we'll help them with straps – we like that side of things."

"We don't like anything that isn't good for the environment and we always try to give the best service we can"

With celebrity guitarists queuing up to get their hands on Heistercamp straps and word of mouth spreading fast through the guitar community, the team are determined not to expand at the cost of their old-fashioned values of reliability and high-quality customer service. In short, they'll be keeping it in the family.

"I don't want to get too big," declares Nigel. "I've been there with the repair side. At the moment it's family, and Alaine and I are building it up with the boys so they can take it to the next stage. How they will take it, I don't know, but at the moment I'd rather keep it smaller, keep the service good and maintain the personal touch."

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Q In which country was Heistercamp originally established?

A Brazil **B** Belarus **C** Belgium

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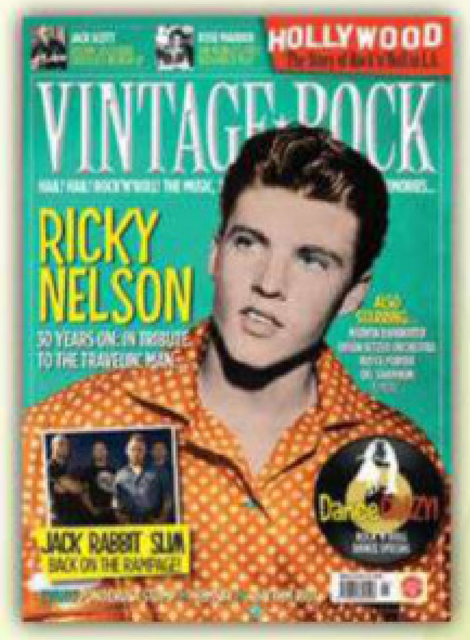

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Six of the best

The kind of ambient widescreen sounds used in post-rock music and film soundtracks require a specific set of tools. Here are some of our favourites

Strymon BigSky

PRICE £399 **CONTACT** www.strymon.net

Reverb is probably the most important effect for ambient guitar sounds – and there are reverb pedals and then there's the BigSky. There's pretty much nothing Strymon's big blue modeller can't do, with no fewer than 12 reverb types and 300 presets loaded into its sky blue enclosure. From subtle spring and room sounds to plate, hall and reverse effects, choral accompaniments, the ethereal shimmer and swell modes and our favourite – the stunningly beautiful Cloud setting, everything you play is painted with an otherworldly, shimmering aura. Each mode has near-endless scope for bottom-of-the-rabbit-hole adjustability, and you can engage infinite sustain and freeze settings. We think it's one of the best effects pedals ever made.

Everything you play through the BigSky is painted with an otherworldly, shimmering aura. We think it's one of tbe best effects pedals ever made

Hungry Robot Pedals The Wash

PRICE £189 **CONTACT** www.hungryrobotpedals.com

Delay is another effect that's integral to ambient and post-rock music, with guitarists often stacking two or more stompboxes to produce epic textural washes. As its name suggests, this pedal from American sonic adventurers Hungry Robot Pedals achieves similar results from a single unit. It's essentially an analogue tap-tempo delay, but its unique 'Wash circuit' adds in reverb and a series of internal feedback loops to create a rolling bed of ambient noise while your original signal still shines through. The Wash gives you 1,000ms of delay time, is adjustable via ripple, resonance, feedback and mix controls, and can be used as an orthodox delay separately from the ambient effect.

EBow

PRICE £79 **CONTACT** www.ebow.com

The EBow, or Energy Bow to give this little black magic box its full name, produces a uniquely haunting sound that's perfect for ambient music. Held in your right hand in place of a pick over a single string, it induces rapid vibrations, working like a real violin or cello bow to create infinite sustain that sounds like huge, harmonically rich amp feedback. It takes a little time to master, but give it a try and soon you'll be creating vast howling drones and ethereal volume swells. Pair the EBow with distortion, reverb, delay or a pulsing tremolo pedal for even more experimental sounds. However, take our advice and start off by winding back your guitar volume and easing the EBow slowly over your neck pickup – unless you want to obliterate your band-mates' hearing. There are also numerous online tutorials showing you how to use the EBow in countless creative ways – emulating everything from horns to flutes and harmonicas.

Electro-Harmonix Stereo Memory Man With Hazarai

PRICE £139 **CONTACT** www.ehx.com

One delay is not enough for many post-rock players, and this is a popular choice among players of that genre. Housed in the same-sized chassis as the current Deluxe Memory Man, this stereo delay packs in almost boundless additional functionality, including multi-tap delay, reverse echo and tape echo filtering, with eight programmable presets. It also incorporates a looper with 30 seconds of loop time – another very useful tool for ambient soundscaping. With all these features, at less than £150, it's one of the most attractive delays on the market. Other fully-functioned delays we'd recommend are Strymon's TimeLine and El Capistan, Eventide's Time Factor and the ageless classic Line 6 DL4. If you want to extend the looping ability offered by the Memory Man, we're big fans of EHX's new 22500 Dual Stereo Looper and the TC Electronic Ditto X4.

The Memory Man With Hazarai packs in boundless functionality including multi-tap delay, reverse echo and tape echo filtering with eight programmable presets

EarthQuaker Devices Rainbow Machine

PRICE £189 **CONTACT** www.earthquakerdevices.com

If you want to get truly weird and experimental, look no further than this pedal from EarthQuaker Devices – a brand that knows plenty about making stompboxes that push sonic boundaries. Foals guitarist Jimmy Smith tells us the band love the Rainbow Machine for its crazy digital effects. This little pink stompbox creates real-time pitch shifting using digital oscillators. It can cover polyphonic harmonies from a 4th down to a third up and you can dial in an accompanying octave harmony using the secondary control. The magic switch takes things even further into aural madness and an external expression pedal can be connected for extra control. It's not a pedal for analogue purists and certainly not a subtle 'on-all-the-time' effect, but if you make soundtracks or experimental music keep one in your toolkit for the extreme, out-there noises it's capable of.

Ernie Ball EB6180 Junior Volume Pedal

PRICE £99 **CONTACT** www.ernieball.co.uk

Spending the best part of £100 on a pedal that has no immediate effect on your sound may seem a painful, even needless cash hit to take, but if you want to play ambient or post-rock music – particularly live with a band – a volume pedal will prove invaluable. Atmospheric, reverb-heavy volume swells are a big part of ambient music, and if you want to pull off effective tremolo-picked, delay-bathed washes without drowning out the rest of your band, it'll be equally useful. If you're planning on incorporating an EBow into your sound, a volume pedal will earn its place on your peadalboard too. This Ernie Ball Junior model is a favourite of ours, as it won't take up too much pedalboard real estate. It's robust, too, with the main pivot shaft made of stainless steel, paired with a long-lasting Kevlar cable – and you can adjust the taper of the volume curve to produce different results. It's £99 you won't regret spending.

StereoBags.com

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Vintage BENCH TEST

'56 LES PAUL TV MODEL

The TV Model was Gibson's response to Fender's Telecaster – a simplified classic. **HUW PRICE** takes a look at a near-mint '56 example

Although most of us probably call these guitars Les Paul Juniors, strictly speaking this is a Les Paul TV Model – as it says on the headstock. The Junior designation was reserved for guitars with cherry or sunburst finishes. A recent conversation with renowned guitar restorer Clive Brown provided a fascinating insight when he pointed out something that's blindingly obvious but often goes unnoticed: in the early 50s, Gibson was worried about the Telecaster, and its response to competition from Fender was the TV Model with its opaque blonde finish and single-ply black pickguard. The TV was, by Gibson standards, a simplified solidbody that was quicker and cheaper to build. Perhaps the clue is in the name – Fender had the Tele, so Gibson came up with the TV.

Perhaps the clue is in the name – Fender had the Tele, so Gibson came up with the TV Model

Even those who are accustomed to handling vintage guitars might find this one out of the ordinary. Naturally, guitar shops have to cover their backsides in their descriptions, but when Vintage Guitar Boutique describes this 1956 Les Paul TV Model as having 'only very minor dings', it could almost be accused of overstating the damage.

There are just a few superficial lacquer chips and some tiny dents that I struggled to find. There is a speck of wood showing on the corner of the heel, but that was probably a buff through done at the factory, because this guitar can't have been used enough for it to be play wear.

It's a 60-year-old instrument that looks and plays as if it just left the factory. The only signs of its age are the way the lacquer has sunk into the wood and

Below **Although we all call them TV Juniors, this guitar's correct model designation is given on the headstock**

storemags.com

Storemags

Wrapover bridges don't allow for fine intonation adjustment, but there is some wiggle room thanks to grub screws behind the bridge posts. The neck's back angle means there's a gap between the end of the neck and the body

KEY FEATURES

'56 Les Paul TV Model

- **SCALE LENGTH** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.65kg/8.04lbs
- **FINISH** TV Yellow
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**

Above **The darker area under the pickguard was caused by a chemical reaction between the lacquer and the plastic**
Opposite page, top **The TV Model's original colour can be seen under the tuner plates. It's much lighter than the area under the pickguard but darker than the areas of finish that have been exposed to light**
Bottom left **Here we can see the original nylon nut with lacquer on its outside edges. This shows it was fitted before the guitar was sprayed**
Bottom right **These guitars were held by their necks as the bodies and headstocks were being sprayed; they were then hung up for the backs of the necks to be sprayed. The headstock and heel ended up getting extra lacquer coats in the process, which is why the back of the neck looks lighter**

a few small areas of lacquer checking. It doesn't even have the musty smell of a guitar that has been case-bound for over half a century. If I didn't know better, I would think it was one of the best pieces ever to have emerged from Gibson's Custom Shop.

There is much debate about how Gibson executed the TV finish and how surviving examples differ from when they were new. With some guitars, you can pop off the pickguard to find an area of finish that hasn't been exposed to UV light and get a sense of how it looked originally. When I removed this pickguard I was surprised to find a darker butterscotch colour with a tan line conforming to the pickguard shape.

It seemed unlikely that this could have been the original colour. UV light tends to yellow up and darken pale and clear finishes, so under normal circumstances the area under the pickguard should be lighter. As always, Clive Brown cleared up that issue, along with several others.

Brown says the darkening of the finish is due to a chemical reaction between the lacquer and the pickguard. He suggested lifting off one of the tuner plates to see what the colour was like underneath. Sure enough, the finish under the tuners has a fresher, yellower appearance than the surrounding areas on the headstock, which indicates the tone of the overall finish has become slightly less vibrant. Having said that, the hue does vary considerably all over the guitar – particularly where the neck transitions into the headstock and around the heel and cutaway, where it's darker. I had assumed this was play wear, but again Clive set me straight.

These guitars were held by their necks while being sprayed. Once the body and headstock had been completed, guitars were hung up to spray the backs of the necks. Certain areas would have ended up with a few extra tinted lacquer coats – hence the darker shading. The control cover edges indicate it was probably hand cut and shaped for final fitting, and there's more finish darkening around the cavity ledge. This supports Brown's theory. There's also an area that is much lighter, and its paste-like appearance suggests this could be the grain filler Gibson used to create the opaque TV finish prior to applying lacquer. Brown also mentioned that Gibson sometimes brush painted some sort of emulsion over the lacquer in this area, for reasons he has never been able to ascertain.

If I didn't know better, I would think it was one of the best pieces ever to emerge from Gibson's Custom Shop

Gibson's preparation and clean-up on the TV models might not have been quite as diligent as on upper-end Les Pauls and jazz guitars. This is evident in the cutaway and around the heel, where the finish has been applied thickly over an imperfectly sanded surface. Gibson probably deemed this good enough for the kids who played these guitars, and it adds to the period charm. The controls have never been >

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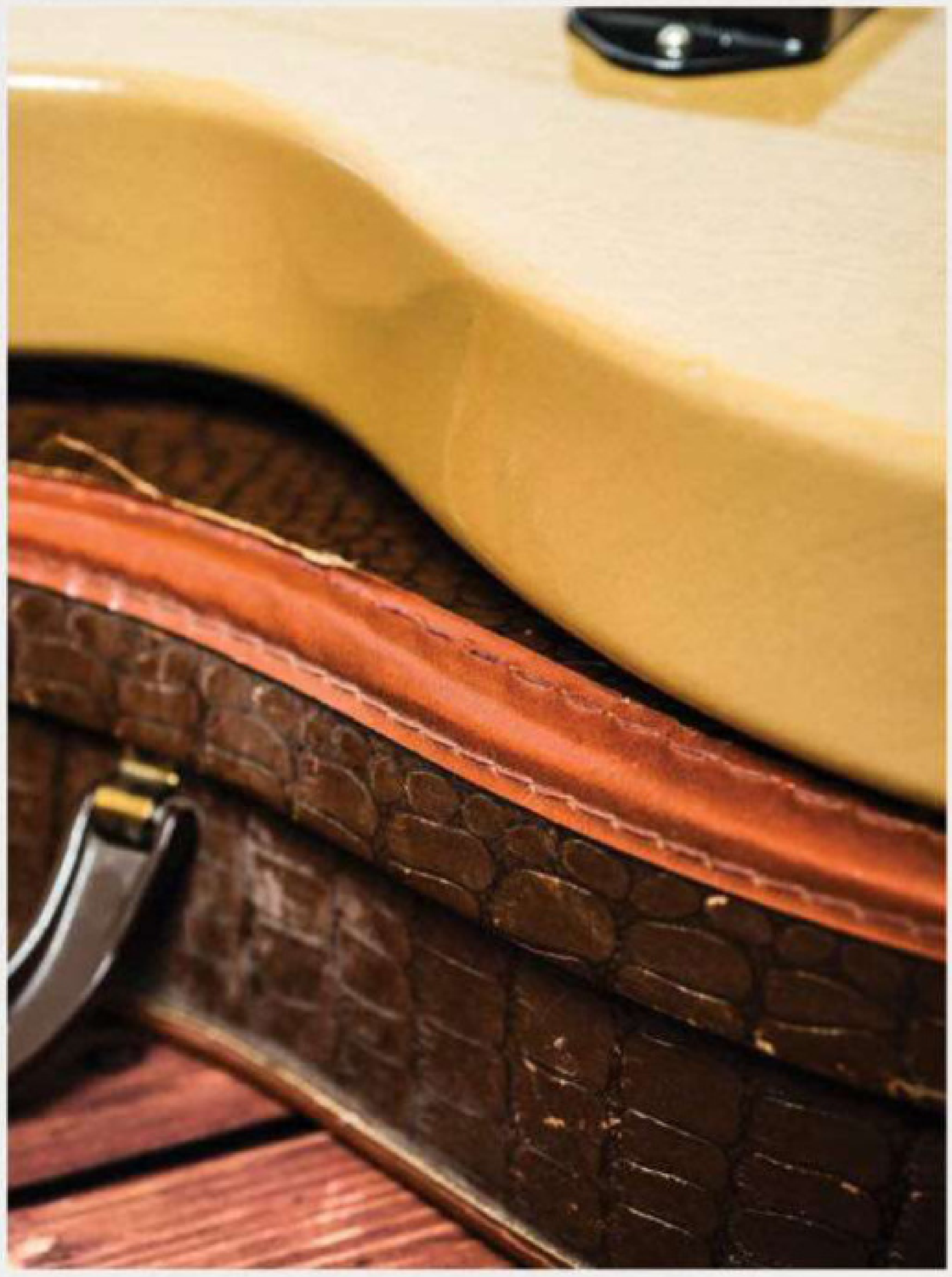

touched, so I felt no need to pull anything out and hunt for date codes. Everything looks as it should, with the correct braided pickup cable and an earlier-style paper/oil 'bumblebee' capacitor soldered to the volume control's centre lug.

Regular readers may recall our recent mid-50s Les Paul Goldtop shoot-out, where the '54 and '57 necks were more notable for their similarities than differences. The TV's neck is nowhere near as fat and it has a modern feel with a comfortable deep C profile that isn't clubby. However, the skinny frets feel as if they're from an earlier era and may divide opinion. They are almost as-new, and I had no difficulties with them.

Almost all set-neck mahogany guitars with wrapover tailpieces sound very resonant acoustically, but this TV has an extra layer of airy chime over the harmonically loaded mids and full bass. The low E and G nut slots are a tad low, making those strings buzz when they're played open, but it's an easy fix.

Common themes are beginning to emerge with these vintage features. The pickups always seem to be microphonic and, at least with 50s Gibsons, there are no areas where the control settings can't be used. This TV can go from a roar to a whisper on the volume control alone without loss of clarity.

In fact, something cool happens with the volume set to seven or below; that upper-harmonic thing becomes more apparent in the electrified tone. Strum or pick gently, especially with your fingers, and there's an eerie sensation that somebody's playing along with you on acoustic guitar.

At full throttle, the tone is woody and weighty with ample sustain. It's more raucous and fuzzier in the bass than a P-90-loaded Goldtop, but the TV is about rock 'n' roll attitude not feedback-free jazzy refinement. So, whether you're picking clean arpeggios, strumming a rhythm part or hammering out a blistering blues solo, this TV delivers the goods.

This TV has an extra layer of airy chime over the harmonically loaded mids and full bass

Playing powerchords through a cranked tweed is one of the most thrilling experiences I've had with an electric guitar. The tuners are a bit slack, the pots need a squirt of switch cleaner and the gleaming polepiece screws of the immaculate P-90 could be adjusted to compensate for a very slightly loud G string, but they're minor issues. It's a guitar that delivers as soon as you plug it in, and it's almost effortless to play.

Imagine being a lucky American teenager given one of these for Christmas in the mid-50s. With a first axe like this, you'd have no excuse for not knuckling down to playing. TV Models might not fall into the 'beginner' category these days, but the same applies. Everything I tried on this guitar sounded wonderful and, in my opinion, the TV Model is one of Gibson's greatest designs. Good luck finding a cleaner or better example.

Above left **This guitar is in remarkable condition and is one of the finest Gibsons we've had the pleasure to play**
Right **It wouldn't be entirely unfair to call the mock-croc case flimsy, but it has kept this guitar safe for 60 years**

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

NEARY MAN

Mark Neary is an experienced session bassist and engineer, having worked with the likes of Noel Gallagher and Adele. **LARS MULLEN** checks out his collection

"In an ideal world, if you were thinking about buying a relatively expensive instrument, you'd want to try it before you splashed out hard-earned cash," says seasoned session player and engineer Mark Neary. "Most of the bass guitars here I've bought by chance, as each one was reasonably priced and I thought, 'if they're not for me, they have enough kudos to be moved on and get my money back and more'. I'm glad to say, though, that I've been lucky every time, especially on some of the older classics.

"I'm not one for buying a bass just because it's a good price. I've seen a couple lately up for a steal, but I wouldn't have a use for the sound they deliver, so it's only working basses for me.

"If we go way back to the beginning, I just had my Fender Jazz Bass from '96, which played and sounded as it should. Then I bought a Burns Bison from 2005 and I was thinking to myself, 'OK, you play bass and you have two basses, but why am I leaning heavily toward the more mature sound of the '96 Jazz Bass?'

"I really didn't realise how diverse different bass guitars could sound until I tried out a '78 Precision in a shop and my inner beast was unleashed. I bought that bass straightaway. To date, I find modern basses just sound, well, too modern. I personally feel that age contributes enormously to the sound.

"It's the older the better for me, I guess it has to be how the wood has dried out over the decades, and maybe when the nitrocellulose finish wears off it lets even more moisture out. When I bought my white 60s Precision it sounded even better than the 70s model. This bass actually was one of those 'chance' buys. Even though it was more expensive than a crack habit..." he laughs. "It dates from February '60, so it's probably the closest I'm gonna get to a 50s model, which I'd love. It's the ideal bass for session work and if I get the call to dep for a bassist. I used it when I stood in for Adele's bass player, who uses a '61 in the studio and live, as I had a very similar model, her songs maintain the same bass vibe and it wasn't alien to the rest of the band.

"You'll notice that my basses have Fender Fatfinger sustainers on the headstocks to iron out a few flat spots on the necks, and they work a >

"I didn't realise how diverse different bass guitars could sound until I tried out a '78 Precision in a shop"

Above **DeArmond pickups on Neary's twin-cutaway Harmony H27**
Opposite page, main picture, top right and middle right **USA-made Barclay**
Bottom left **Harmony H27**
Bottom centre **Harmony H27 headstock**
Bottom right **10-string Zane Beck Custom pedal steel guitar**

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treat. I noticed a difference straightaway, they're great for studio work instead of having to massively compress everything."

Neary's main basses are, indeed, from the 60s and a little unusual as modern-day workhorse instruments. "My most versatile bass is the single-cutaway Harmony H22 dating from '63. That bass has a lot going for it – apart from being lightweight with an ultra-thin tone, chambered body and looking cool, producers love the balanced tone, as it just sits in the mix. Played with a pick, it can be bright and twangy, but if I use my thumb it's really subby with Thomastik-Infeld flatwound strings.

"I also have a '69 double-cut Harmony H22/1, again with a DeArmond Golden Tone gold foil pickup. This one is fitted with roundwound strings, has more of an edge to it and can lend itself to pushing an amp's front end a little more. I'm tempted to fit roundwounds to the singlecut, but it just sounds too good as it is. Both have the 'toilet-flusher' switch, which reduces the low end for more of a baritone register.

"I've got another twin-cutaway Harmony, a H27 also from the 60s, which at the time was the company's flagship model with upgraded appointments like intricate bindings, shell patterned celluloid headstock, a pair of upgraded DeArmond pickups and a six-way adjustable metal bridge. While it's also lightweight, it's physically big. Ronnie Lane, of The Faces, wasn't a big guy, but he looked blisteringly cool playing his.

"I love that 'being smothered by bass' look. Luckily, I'm over six foot, so I'd like to think the Harmony basses look balanced when I wear them, unlike my '66 Fender Mustang, which does look a bit weird on me. It's a cool bass – it just sounds like, well, wood, with a really punchy midrange. Looking at the body scars, I would say maybe a punk bassist once owned this one. I love all that natural wear and tear. I used this on Baxter Dury's [son of Ian Dury] album, it just fitted so well.

"The Silvertone I have is a Danelectro-built 1444 bass and is from the early 60s. As we know, it's built from Masonite. It has a usable and distinct sound, but I need to find a gig for it.

"You'll also notice that I've taken a lot of the hardwear off these basses, especially bridge covers, and the pickup cover on my Rickenbacker 4003, dating back to '77. I just find it all gets in the way when I want to mute or dampen strings. The Ricky is a great bass, what can you say about the performance of a Ricky that we don't already know? I used it on a session with producer Dan Carey; he said it sounded so good that after I left he went out and bought one."

"My 1960 Precision Bass is the ideal bass for session work and if I get the call to dep for a bassist"

Whilst he is a popular bassist and respected session player, Mark has added another set of strings to his bow.

"We are in an age where musicians need to be as diverse as possible to survive," he says. "A while ago, I was thinking what else I could offer, apart from being a session player, a programmer and an engineer. So I bought a 10-string Zane Beck Custom pedal steel guitar dating from '69, which has proved invaluable. It's not for the faint-hearted, and certainly a lesson in dexterity, which includes operating the levers with your knees. I sometimes have a problem with my right knee, it's inclined to rush ahead of the beat. There are so many cool pedal steel players out there for inspiration.

"I don't really listen to many bass players, although I adore the tone that Carol Kaye has, >

Previous page, main picture **2005 Burns Bison (left), Silvertone 1444 built by Danelectro**
Top left and centre left **'66 Fender Mustang**
Bottom left **Hofner 185 with imitation snakeskin finish (left), Rickenbacker 4003**
Bottom centre **German double bass**
Bottom right **Headstock on Danelectro-built Silvertone**
This page, above left **1996 Fender Jazz Bass (left), 1960 Precision Bass**
Above right **Jazz Bass headstock**

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Avobe left **Kala U-Bass (left), Samick Greg Bennett travel bass**
Above right **Hayman 40-40 (left), Hoya 5044**

the amount of records she has been on is quite incredible. I also like the outrageous playing of Dave Richmond on Serge Gainsbourg's *Histoire de Melody Nelson* album, and I love the deep basslines of Kraftwerk from the 70s onwards. Their album *The Man-Machine* has a real funk to it, even though it's all synth basses.

"I've got a German-built Hoya 5044, weighing and sounding the same as a pregnant Rottweiler! It's an odd bass, but it's full of tricks with three pickups, a five-way selector and a couple of balance controls. I'm using this bass at a show I'm doing with Jane Horrocks that's running at the Young Vic in London. The story theme is based on the Northern post-punk era in the 80s, at a time when music in this country was brilliant. It covers a lot of songs from that period, so the versatility of this bass makes it ideal for the job. We also have Rat Scabies on drums, who is amazing, rather like a train out of control.

"Every time I look at my 70s Hayman 4040, Buck Rogers comes to mind. It's another British classic of course, built by the guys who eventually launched Wal basses. I think the bassist from Mud used to play this model. Fitted with 65-gauge black nylon strings, it's ideal for just stepping back and taking it easy, great for slow reggae basslines with a wildebeest of a bottom end."

From large to small, Mark then produces a mini bass with a giant sound. He explains: "The Kala U-Bass has an even bigger sound than the Hayman. It's basically a high-quality ukulele bass with a mahogany body, a solid spruce top and loaded with Road Toad Pahoehoe strings, which are really loose and made from a kind of rubber. It looks more than a little weird on a tall guy like me, so I played it sitting down when I used it at the Lead Belly Fest in 2015 at The Albert Hall. That was a cool gig, with the likes of Van Morrison, Billy Bragg, Eric Burdon, Walter Trout, Gwen Dickey and Josh White Jr. I used it on a duet with Gwen and Josh. There's no room for mistakes with this one, with big strings and narrow frets. Through an amp or PA, this U-Bass sounds bigger than my double bass – which is a non-specific East German model from the 70s.

"I took it on the tube to get to Terry Britten's State Of The Ark studios in London. Not only is it a nightmare to transport, but for whatever reason it has the ability to attract crazy people who ask if it's a big violin. So I avoid going underground with it. I played it on Noel Gallagher's first High Flying Birds album at Terry's studio. They wanted a roomy sound, so they recorded me in the toilet. It was cramped to say the least but it worked, it sounds cool on the album. We had a strict no-flush rule, or else we'd have to wait 10 minutes between takes.

"Noel Gallagher wanted a roomy sound, they recorded me in the toilet. It was cramped to say the least..."

"My USA-made Barclay is my number one guitar for live and studio work, and it kind of fits in where we started talking about old mature basses. It probably came out of the Harmony factory like the H22 models, as it has the same hardware, including the toilet flush lever and gold foil pickup. This is a devastatingly good-sounding bass, a cross between a Ricky and a Precision, a massive sound played with fingers or edgy with a pick. There's a little damage near the end pin – I'm not sure if it's been under water or set on fire, but I'm cool with that."

For more information about Mark Neary, visit markneary-musician.com

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TUITION

All about... P-90s

Vintage PAF humbuckers may get all the plaudits, but many tone experts consider the P-90 to be Gibson's greatest ever pickup. **HUW PRICE** explains why...

Meet the ancestors

Gibson didn't come up with the P-90 out of thin air. Although undisputedly the company's greatest single coil, the P-90 was actually part of a design process that began during the 1930s and (arguably) culminated in the fabled PAF of 1957.

Jazz guitarist Charlie Christian played a huge part in popularising electric guitars, and his name has even become synonymous with the pickup that was fitted to his 1930s Gibson ES-150 guitars. The pickup was gigantic, with a straight blade and two cobalt steel magnets. Its cumbersome mounting mechanism required three holes to be drilled through the front of the guitar.

The magnets had to be huge because the steel Gibson used had relatively low gauss, so the whole assembly weighed 2lbs. The 1930s saw the development of alnico. This alloy of aluminium, nickel and cobalt could be used to make very powerful permanent magnets. Equivalent magnetic strength could be achieved with much smaller components, which had a profound effect on pickup and speaker design.

By 1940, Gibson had started fitting a new style of pickup to its ES-100, ES-125 and ES-150 guitars, as well as lap steels. Designed by Walt Fuller with alnico magnets, everything was housed under a compact rectangular metal cover with a height adjustment/mounting screw at each end. Some even had adjustable exposed polepieces, and all three versions of this pickup are known as the P-13.

Wound with 38-gauge wire, many Charlie Christian units have a DC resistance below 2.5k. Early P-13 pickups tend to be 6.5k or above, which suggests Gibson graduated to thinner magnet wire. These P-13s were later fitted to some Harmony and Silvertone guitars, and they sound fantastic.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the US joined World War Two and pickup development, along with guitar manufacturing, was put on hold as the Gibson factory helped with the war effort. Straight after the war, Gibson was back in the guitar business, and the Walt Fuller-designed P-90 made its debut in 1946.

Anatomy of the P-90

Gibson's marketing had made a big deal of the P-13's adjustable polepieces, so it's unsurprising that feature was carried over to the P-90. A coil of 42 AWG plain enamel magnet wire was machine wound onto a plastic bobbin. The coil shape was shorter but significantly wider than the coils seen on the Strat and Tele pickups that followed. Like early PAFs, P-90 coils were wrapped with insulating tape and they were not wax potted.

Two sand-cast alnico magnets were placed below the bobbin, separated by a metal spacer (keeper), with both south (or sometimes north) poles facing towards the polepieces. The magnetic field flows through the centre of the coil and back around to the outer edges of the magnets.

Alnico 3 magnets were used until around 1957, when Gibson changed to alnico 5. Interestingly, since the magnets oppose each other, some push apart over time. This misalignment refocuses the magnetic field, and some believe it can affect tone.

Gibson used braided single-core output wire that was soldered to the two-coil output wires on the underside of the metal baseplate. The baseplate had protruding extensions on those P-90s destined for Les Paul Juniors and hollow-bodied models. The vacuum formed plastic covers extended over the extensions, and this P-90 style was nicknamed the dogear.

P-90s for the Les Paul Standard, Custom or Special had screw holes in between the A and D string pole pieces on one side and the G and B on the other. The fixing screws went straight into the body, and these P-90s became known as soapbars because the rectangular covers look like bars of soap.

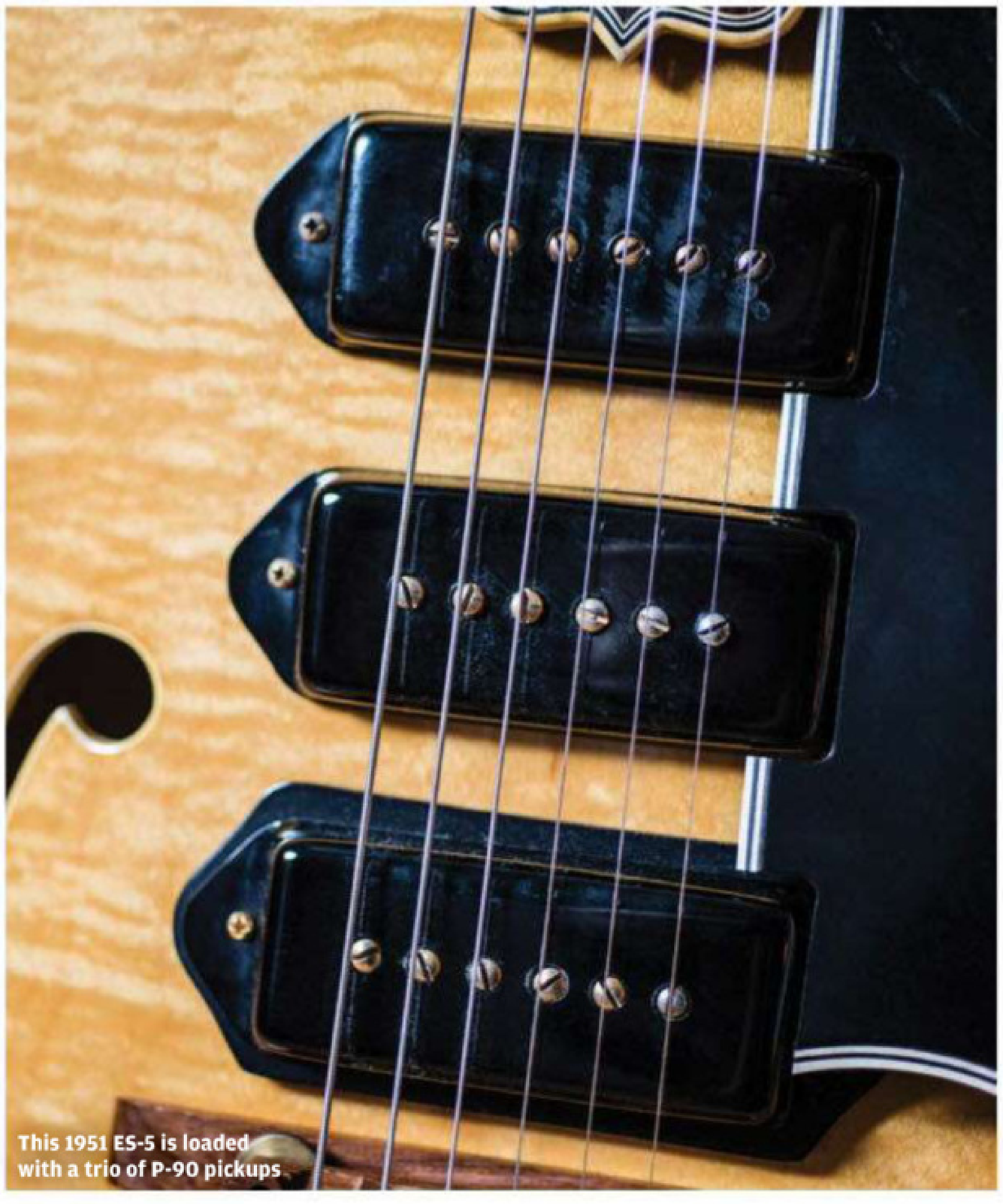
There are two other variations on the P-90 theme. P-90s with non-adjustable alnico rod magnets were also made around 1946 and fitted to some ES-125s.

Described by Gibson as "lost for a lot of years", this version was recently resurrected as the P-90ST and P-90SR for the Melody Maker.

The 'staple' P-90 was far more significant and has something of a cult following. Permanent magnets with a rectangular cross-section were used instead of magnets under the baseplate. The height of each of these polepieces could be adjusted individually using a small screw. In fact, the design is almost identical to that of the DeArmonds being used by Gretsch during that era.

There is an interesting, unsubstantiated story that Les Paul preferred the DeArmond's clarity and response to the P-90's, and Gibson was in the awkward position of having its main endorser using another company's pickups. Accordingly, the 'staple' was designed hastily to get the DeArmond tone from a Gibson-branded pickup.

They were fitted to high-end jazz models as well as pre-1957 Les Paul Customs – often in the neck position, with a regular P-90 in the bridge. Paul himself played >

The basic sonic signature of the P-90 is strong mids, full bass and harmonically complex trebles

This 1951 ES-5 is loaded with a trio of P-90 pickups

BUYER'S GUIDE

Pretty much every pickup manufacturer offers a P-90 these days, although some are more vintage-accurate than others. Try not to get too fixated on power, and consider the merits of both types of alnico – maybe with alnico 3 in the neck and alnico 5 for the bridge. It's also possible to swap A5 magnets for A3, or vice versa, if you want to tweak your tone. Modern twists include ceramic magnets for even more output and noise-cancelling designs.

SEYMOUR DUNCAN STAPLE DOG EAR $225

This seems to be the only authentic-spec staple P-90 available. With unpotted coils wound to 9.2K and alnico 5 magnets, this Custom Shop product can be ordered in black or cream with nickel or gold plated metal parts. It's also available in a soapbar format.

MONTY'S GUITARS J90 £93

This one is included because we recently installed a J90 in a high-end Gibson Les Paul Junior Reissue. The improvement was dramatic to say the least. Features include potted plain aluminium coils with alnico 3 magnets and a 7.7K DC resistance. The manufacturer recommends these for hollow-bodied guitars, but they're available in soapbar format too.

KINMAN P-90 HX £129

Like all single coils, P-90s generate hum. Various hum-cancelling P-90 designs have been tried, but most lose some of the P-90's tone, along with the hum. Kinman's solution is amongst the most highly regarded, with 202 individual parts that include highly efficient magnetic shields around the upper coil and a lower coil of much thicker wire wound onto a laminated steel bobbin.

VINTAGE P-90 $275

These were mass-produced pickups, so it's easy to find second-hand P-90s of 50s and 60s manufacture. If you explore this route, it might be advisable to buy from a reputable dealer. If it's wax potted or wound to 8.5K or above, the pickup has probably been re-wound. There are plenty of P-13s about, too, for around $200.

Black Beauties back in the early 50s, so you can draw your own conclusions on the matter.

P-90 tone

The DC resistance of vintage P-90s varies between 6.5K and 8.5K, with most somewhere in between. They were nominally hotter than P-13s and Charlie Christians, however inductance readings provide a more reliable indication of output level and tone than DC resistance.

Inductance accounts for wire gauge and magnetic strength, and therefore represents the system as a whole rather than a single element in isolation. Jason Lollar describes inductance as "a measure of the physical property to induce a current", and pickups are – after all – current generators. Generally speaking, higher inductance equates to more output and increased low end.

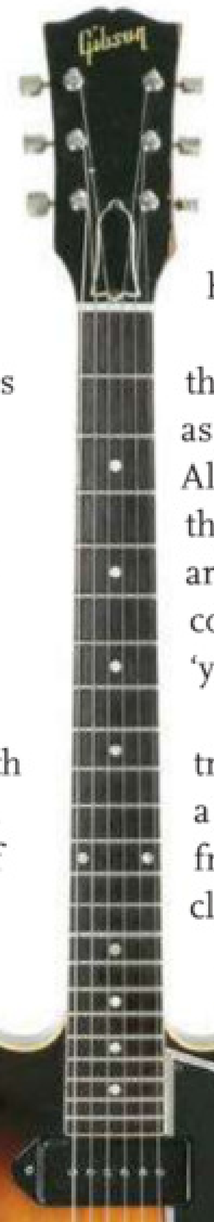
Vintage-spec Strat pickups usually have an inductance of around 2.25 Henries and PAFs read around 4.25 Henries. Charlie Christians were generally around 3 Henries and vintage P-90s were closer to 6 Henries. Compare these readings with hot humbuckers, which can have inductance readings of 8 Henries or more.

Stronger alnico magnets tend to increase a pickup's inductance, so the later alnico 5 P-90s are considered to have a more aggressive, snarly and powerful tone than the earlier alnico 3 versions. You may associate the alnico 5 with the hot blues of Freddie King or the punk grind of Johnny Thunders and Mick Jones.

The alnico 3 may be more closely equated to 50s jazzbox tones or the early rock 'n' roll stylings of Scotty Moore. The earlier pickups sound brighter, softer and sweeter with lower output. Even so, if someone asks what P-90s sound like, you'd have to say much depends on the guitar they're mounted in and the amp you're playing through.

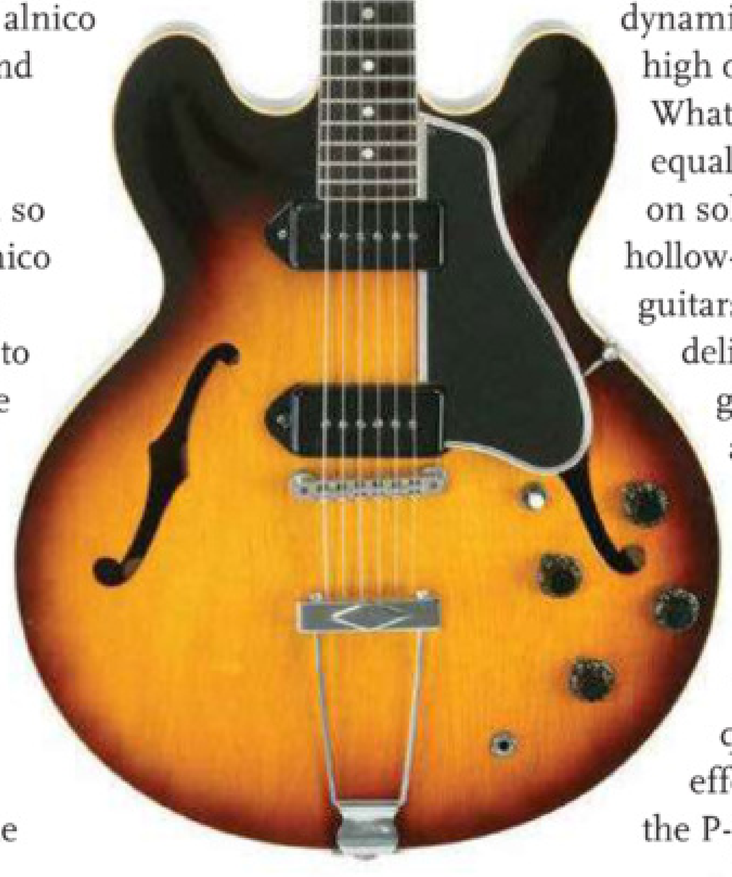
That's the essence of what makes the P-90 perhaps the finest all-round pickup ever created. The basic sonic signature is strong mids, full bass and harmonically complex trebles. They can sound woody and mellow or they can be utterly brutal; and you can use them for jazz, blues, country, rockabilly, punk, heavy rock and metal.

They can sound woody and mellow or utterly brutal; you can use them for jazz, blues, country, punk and metal



From 1946 until 1957, the P-90 reigned supreme as Gibson's premier pickup. Although it may have occupied the throne ever since, there are still many guitarists who consider the PAF as the 'young pretender'.

Walt Fuller's enduring triumph was the creation of a pickup that combined a wide frequency range, superb clarity and player-friendly dynamics with high output. What's more, it's equally effective on solid- and hollow-bodied guitars, and it delivers the goods in any musical genre. No other pickup ticks all those boxes quite as effectively as the P-90.



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Chord Clinic

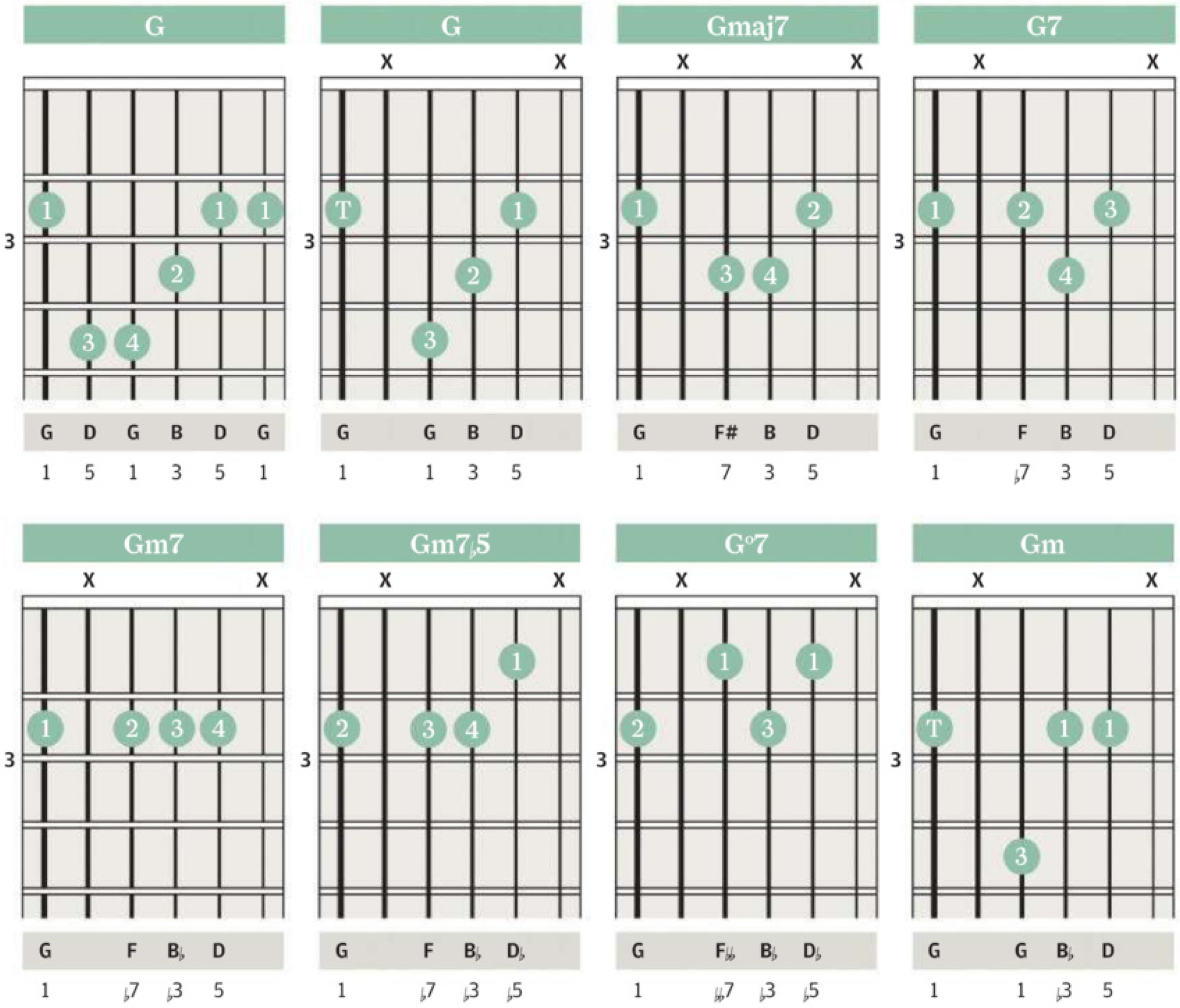
Last month, we showed you how to master barre chords, but they're not the only chord shapes that can be moved all over the fretboard. **ROD FOGG** introduces some handy four-note variations...

In last month's Chord Clinic we had a good look at barre chords; majors, minors and various flavours of sevenths. We found that they have the advantage of being moveable, as each shape can be played at any fret. But they tend to include many doubled notes – look at the first G major chord in figure 1 and you'll see that the root note appears three times, and the fifth appears twice, giving it a somewhat hollowed-out sound. The second chord in figure 1 disposes of most of the doubled notes to provide you with a four-note voicing that is focused and punchy, and just as moveable.

The remaining chords in figure 1 pick up where last month's column left off, with a useful collection of four-note voicings of major seventh, seventh and minor seventh chords. Notice that each new chord changes only one note from the previous chord, and that we have gone on to include Gm7♭5 (that's G minor seven flat five) and G°7 (G diminished seventh). These chords are less common but can be useful in jazzier styles. Gm7♭5 could also be called G half-diminished and G°7 is sometimes written as Gdim7. Notice the technically correct 'F double flat' in the G°7 chord; feel free to call it 'E'. The final chord is an equally focused and solid-sounding G minor. Remember, these chords can be played at any fret, but pay attention to damping the A string and the top E.

Figure 2 applies the same technique to the middle four strings of the guitar. Allow me to talk you through it... We start with a D major chord with only one doubled note – the root on the G string. Try fingering this chord with your third finger lying across the fourth, third and secong strings; it's a useful technique, but not everyone finds it comfortable. From

Four G (Fig 1)



there, we develop a Dmaj7 chord by lowering the doubled root one semitone. Drop it (or flatten it) another semitone and you have D7. Flatten the major third to a minor third and you have Dm7. Next, flatten the fifth and you have Dm7♭5. Flatten the minor seventh to create a diminished seventh and you have a D°7, or 'D diminished seventh', chord. Again, we've used the technically correct 'C double flat' for the diminished seventh interval, but among friends it can be called 'B'.

We need some musical examples that use these chord shapes. If you've ever listened to Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Under The Bridge* you might have been struck by the rich chiming chord held at the end of each verse. It's Emaj7, using the second shape from figure 2 and played two frets higher with the root on the seventh fret. The Chili Peppers are, for a rock band, a source of all sorts of interesting chord sequences. In *Universally Speaking*, you can find F#°7 followed by B7 (just before the vocal "win in the long run..."). Try playing the diminished seventh from figure 1 and the seventh chord from figure 2 with their roots on the second fret.

Searching out examples of m7♭5 in the rock world is trickier, but lovers of Cuban music can hear Dm, Em7♭5 and A7 on the opening track of the *Buena Vista Social Club* album. Another interesting chord sequence is David Bowie's *Space Oddity*, which opens with an Fmaj7 chord that then returns for the dreamy "sitting in a tin can" section. A tranquil, dreamy flavour is the essence of a major seventh chord.

Seventh chords are common in blues sequences. A straightforward blues in G would have four bars of G7, two bars of C7 and two more bars of G7. Then the last four bars would be D7, C7, G7 and D7 to take you back to the beginning. Using the seventh chords from figures 1 and 2, you could play this sequence in many different ways, because the G7 shape played at the eighth fret would give you C7, or at the 10th fret D7. Similarly, the D7 shape from figure 2 could be used to play C7 with its root at the third fret, or G7 with its root at the 10th fret. Try changing the chord shape with every bar.

You may well know that there's a popular variation on the blues, sometimes called a 'quick change' blues. In the above example, the second bar goes to C7, but then it's straight back to G7 and everything else stays the same. If you include the open-string C7 chord, you now have three ways to play C7, so there's no need to be stuck with the same shape all the time. It can also be fun to mess with the last four chords – try Am7, D7, G7, D7 instead. Also, the chord before Am7 could be E7 instead of G7. Remember to stay on G7 for the last chord when you want to end. >

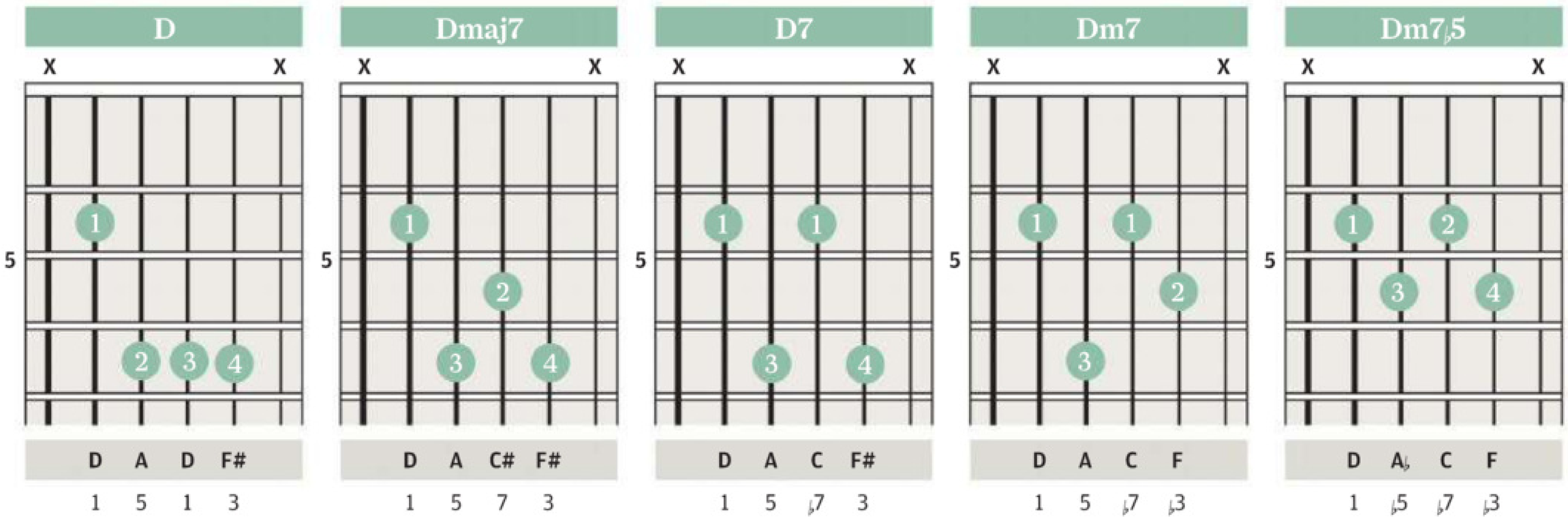
Jazz songs from the 1920s to the 1940s are often based on 'stock' progressions, which can be found in song after song. Here's a good example: Gmaj7, G#°7, Am7, D7.

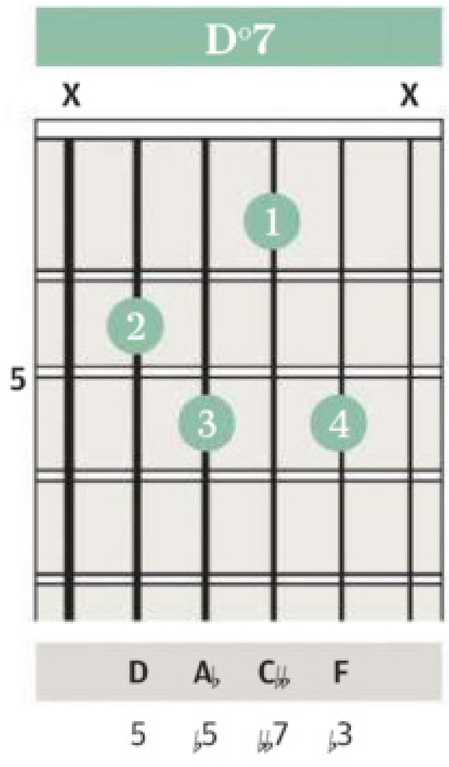
The first three chords are shapes from figure 1 – one fret up for G#°7 and two for Am7. Just play it round and round; it's similar to *I Got Rhythm* and about 1,000 other songs. Don't forget, with these moveable chords you can play the progression in any key just by changing where you start. You could also hop over to the inner four strings and play Cmaj7, C#°7, Dm7 and G7. This time, the first three chords are from figure 2, starting on the third fret for Cmaj7 and then fourth fret for C#°7.

Figure 3 introduces one new four-note movable chord – D9. This compact four-note voicing leaves out the fifth, A, from the chord. You can use a ninth chord in place of a seventh, so try the blues in G, substituting this shape for the C7 or D7 chords; or, alternatively, up at the 10th fret for G9 instead of G7.

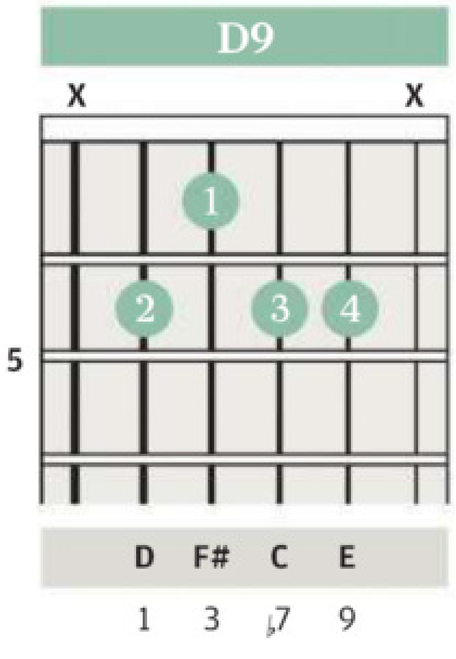
To end this month's lesson with something in a slightly more rocking vein, try grooving on a bar of Am7, followed by a bar of D9. Then check out Carlos Santana's version of *Oye Como Va* for inspiration. You could record yourself playing this groove and then try soloing over it using the A minor pentatonic scale or – if you know your modes – the A Dorian mode.

Explorations in D (Fig 2)





Moveable feast (Fig 3)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: in praise of the DIY Handbook and getting to grips with digital amp and pedal emulation software

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DIY enthusiast

The very useful DIY Handbook that accompanied the May issue took me back in time to that first article in the, then, *Guitar* magazine, which outlined the basics of guitar maintenance for the novice tinkerer. Over the years, various more wide-ranging articles and complete guitar-build projects followed and both my skills and confidence in my ability around guitars grew.

Whereas once my allen-key gripped hand trembled as it neared the truss rod of a guitar, I gradually became proficient not only in carrying out all the necessary adjustments to enable my guitars to play well, but also became informed enough to carry out repairs. Those DIY articles took me along the right path to dress and replace worn frets, carry out finish repairs and even fix broken headstocks for a couple of careless friends! All this inevitably led to me successfully assembling several complete guitars, now that the 'physics' had been so well explained in those articles over the years.

I'm sure that the DIY Handbook will encourage and give confidence to a whole new generation of players who just need that first bit of encouragement to wield the screwdriver in the direction of their pride and joy!

Stephen Davies, via email

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

Virtual reality

I've decided, finally, to enter the virtual world of plug-ins and the like, leaving behind my trusty array of Boss effects pedals, but only under one condition: that I can get as realistic a sound as possible out of the emulated application/s. Now, I'm a bit lost here because I have heard positive things for just about everything I've looked at – one wonders if there is a small army of PR guys going around putting their positive spin on things – but that's cool, I just want to hear it from an authority, such as yourselves. I've heard of Guitar Rig, AmpliTube, Line 6 POD Farm, now Positive Grid that you mentioned last issue. Can you direct me towards the most accurate-sounding software on offer so I don't have to tear my hair out even more than I have already?

Robert Roemer, via email

***G&B** Hi Robert, well done for taking the plunge and entering the world of digital recording! Quite simply, there isn't a 'best' solution for amp and pedal emulation when recording via a computer, merely a most suitable option for you – and we'd recommend trying a few. The members of the Guitar & Bass team have had positive experiences with all the software you mention. Gary uses AmpliTube and loves the wealth of accurate-sounding amps, pedals and mics you can buy inexpensively through its Custom Shop. Tom swears by Guitar Rig for the quality of sounds and range of plug-ins, and Positive Grid BIAS allows you to design and build your own amps. If you use a Mac, GarageBand is an easy-to-master and user-friendly option too. Good luck, and let us know how you get on!*

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Summer Acoustic Special!

Don't be embarrassed around the campfire; pick up a copy of next month's G&B for acoustic tone tips, buying advice and chord lessons

INTERVIEWS

• Ethan Johns • John McLaughlin •
• John Myung and more...

REVIEWED

• Martin • Yamaha • Stone Deaf • Supro •
• G&L • Patrick James Eggle and more...

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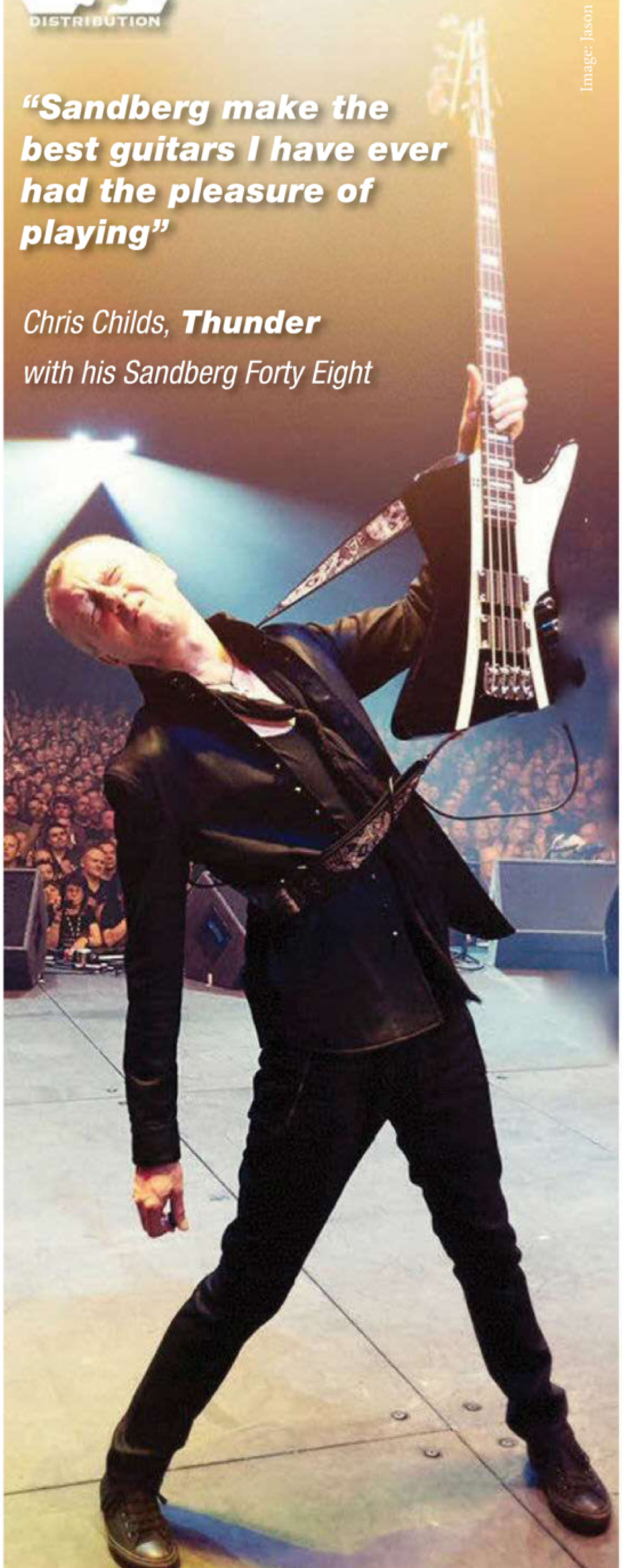
Image: Jason Joyce



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New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Various Artists

DAY OF THE DEAD

Day Of The Dead is a personal tribute from The National guitarists Aaron and Bryce Dessner to the band they grew up adoring. All profits from the record go towards the Red Hot organisation's worldwide fight against AIDS/HIV. It's a true labour of love, spanning 59 tracks and featuring a cast of 60 artists that reads like a who's who of American alt-country and indie. Highlights from the six-hour set are numerous, with The War On Drugs, Kurt Vile, The Walkmen, Wilco, Lee Ranaldo, Sharon Van Etten, Stephen Malkmus & The Jicks and The Flaming Lips all succeeding in tastefully making The Dead's work their own. Indeed, not being a Deadhead is no barrier to enjoying this lovingly curated collection that culminates with Dead founder Bob Weir joining The National on a sprawling live version of *I Know You Rider*. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Grateful Dead, The National*

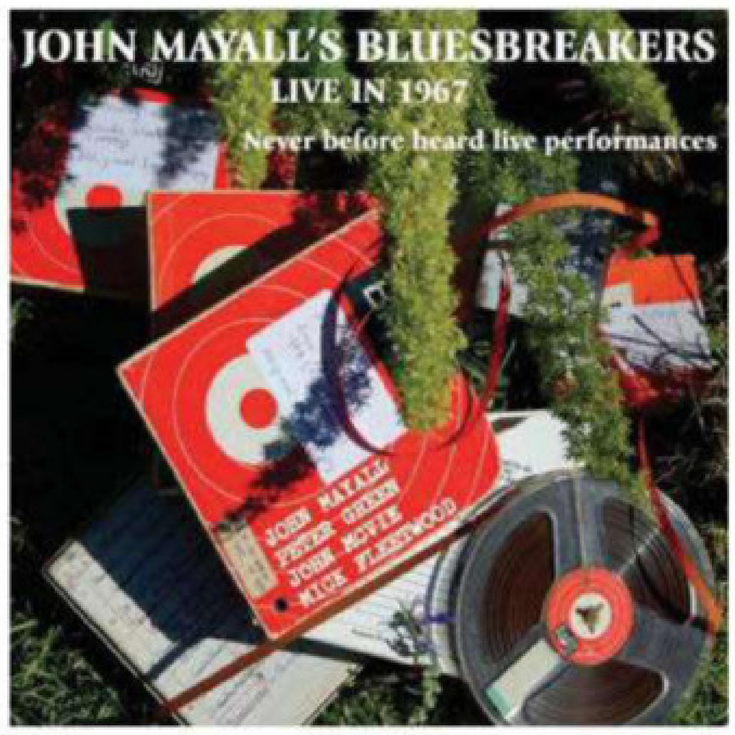
Kevin Morby

THE SINGING SAW

Kevin Morby started out life in American indie bands Woods and The Babies but has since carved out a reputation as a gifted solo songwriter in his own right. *The Singing Saw* is his third album, recorded in Woodstock, New York. It's a charming work of observational writing and considered arrangements. Vocal comparisons to Bob Dylan will be inevitable and the excellent *Dorothy* draws on the influence of The Velvet Underground. Lead single *I Have Been To The Mountain* is a lazy summery shuffle, with insistent acoustic playing and joyful horns. The delicious tremolo from Morby's Fender Vibrolux illuminates the gentle *Drunk And On A Star*, while on the Doors-y title track he exhibits some tasty bluesy soloing and John Andrews contributes some eerie saw playing. You were right to go it alone, Kevin. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bob Dylan, The Velvet Underground*



John Mayall's Bluesbreakers

LIVE IN 1967 PART 2

This second helping of restored archive recordings focuses on a series of London gigs the Bluesbreakers played in 1967, with a stellar line-up that was together for only three months. So we have Mick Fleetwood on drums, John McVie on bass, Mayall on keys, vocals and harmonica, and – of course – a young Peter Green on Les Paul, filling the shoes of the at the time recently-departed Eric Clapton. The tracks were originally recorded illicitly on a single-channel reel-to-reel tape recorder by a Dutch gig-goer, Tom Huissen, so the quality is lo-fi in the extreme, but the 13 tracks – a mix of covers and Mayall originals – are a precious time capsule for any lover of blues. The instrumental *Greeny*, with its sinuous, biting, plain amazing lead-guitar phrasing, is worth the entrance fee alone. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Fleetwood Mac, Cream*

Dan Patlansky

INTROVERTIGO

Patlansky's last record, *Dear Silence Thieves*, garnered the South African blues rocker critical praise, and this follow-up carries on where it left off – fiery riff-rock that references SRV and Hendrix but pushes it into new directions. Dan's a capable vocalist, too, taking on a range of styles from straight shuffles to ballads; his varied lead playing is packed with tightly coiled licks and runs that had us reaching for a Strat. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Philip Sayce, Rival Sons*

Ulysses

LAW AND ORDER

Bath natives Ulysses have toured with Rival Sons and members of The Black Crowes and their latest album sees them collaborate with Robert Plant producer Steve Evans. A heady glam-rock brew, *Law And Order* brings late-period Beatles, ELO, Supergrass and Super Furry Animals influences to the party and is packed with infectious hooks. A fine time was had by all. **CV**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *ELO, Supergrass*

Mark Tremonti

DUST

Tremonti's blend of melodic riffs, euphoric vocals and grungy edginess shapes his latest – a fast-paced thrash. The title track is a ballad-type platform that enables Tremonti to expose a deeper well of emotion, while songs such as *Catching Fire* and *The Cage* have a rawer charm, and echo early Soundgarden. Despite not deviating far from his previous work, *Dust* is an enjoyable listen. **TT**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Alter Bridge, Trivium*

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TALKBOX

ANDY ROURKE

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Former Smiths bassist, current D.A.R.K. collaborator and New York resident Andy Rourke reveals all...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"1964 Fender Precision bass. It's the same age as me but probably in better condition. I've owned it since I was 19 when I came over to America on a Smiths tour. I used it on 95 per cent of The Smiths' songs and everything since, including the D.A.R.K. record."

2 In another life I would be...
"A cat, for sure. I have a cat, Nera. When I look at the average day in the life of a cat it's quite idyllic. They eat, they sleep, they take a crap and then it all goes round again."

3 The moment that started it all...
"I'm sure I'm not the first to say this, but it was The Beatles. They had a lot of mystique for me, growing up. The first record I learnt to play along with on my guitar was *Best of The Beach Boys*. I learnt every song on there."

4 The one that got away...
"My Yamaha BB2000 bass. I don't know what I was thinking when I sold it, but I still regret it. I tried to buy it back, but the guy wasn't playing ball. The guy I sold it to put it on eBay, but with my name on it, and someone outbid me at the last second! It was the bass I played *Barbarism Begins At Home* and *The Draize Train* on."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"There have been many, but one time when we were touring the US with The Smiths I walked onstage for an encore with my arms in the air, sunglasses on, cigarette in mouth, very jubilant, and then fell over the monitor..."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"I've been given a lot over the years, but this one I remembered and acted on – get yourself a good manager. In the past, I didn't have one and things became a little bit hectic to say the least..."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I'm a creature of habit when it comes to this. I always play the first few bars of Neil Young's *Old Man*. It's just a good pointer to whether the guitar's in tune because of the nature of the chords. I just use it as a tuning tool or, if I'm using a different guitar, to get the feel of it."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"It used to be vodka, but now it's water. I'm no spring chicken anymore, so I can't be having any crazy nights and crazy days."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"Gilbert O'Sullivan. I was obsessed by his songs on the radio as a kid growing up, and I still give them a spin now and then, usually when I'm travelling alone with my headphones. I just love his songs, he's a great songwriter."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"The sitar. I became fascinated by it after hearing George Harrison play it on many Beatles records. I may even attempt it some day..."

***Science Agrees*, the debut album by D.A.R.K., featuring Dolores O'Riordan, Andy Rourke and Ole Koretsky, is due out in the summer on Cooking Vinyl**

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hugh

Stand Out in the Crowd

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